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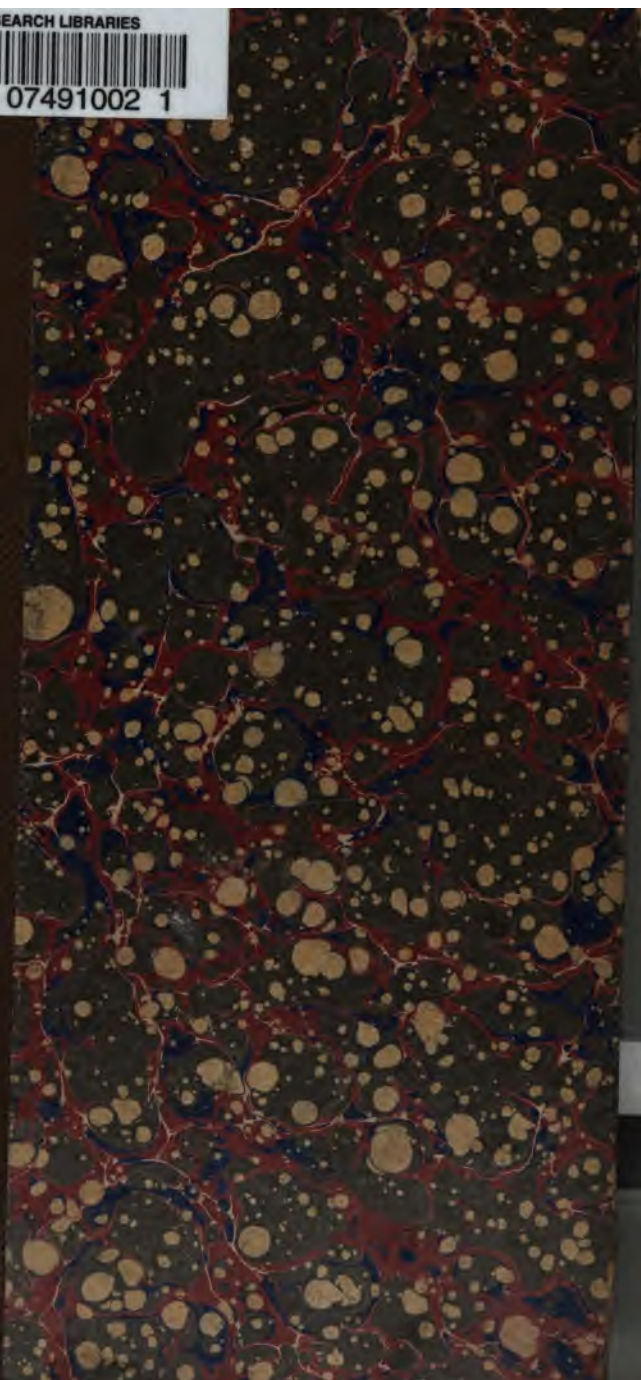
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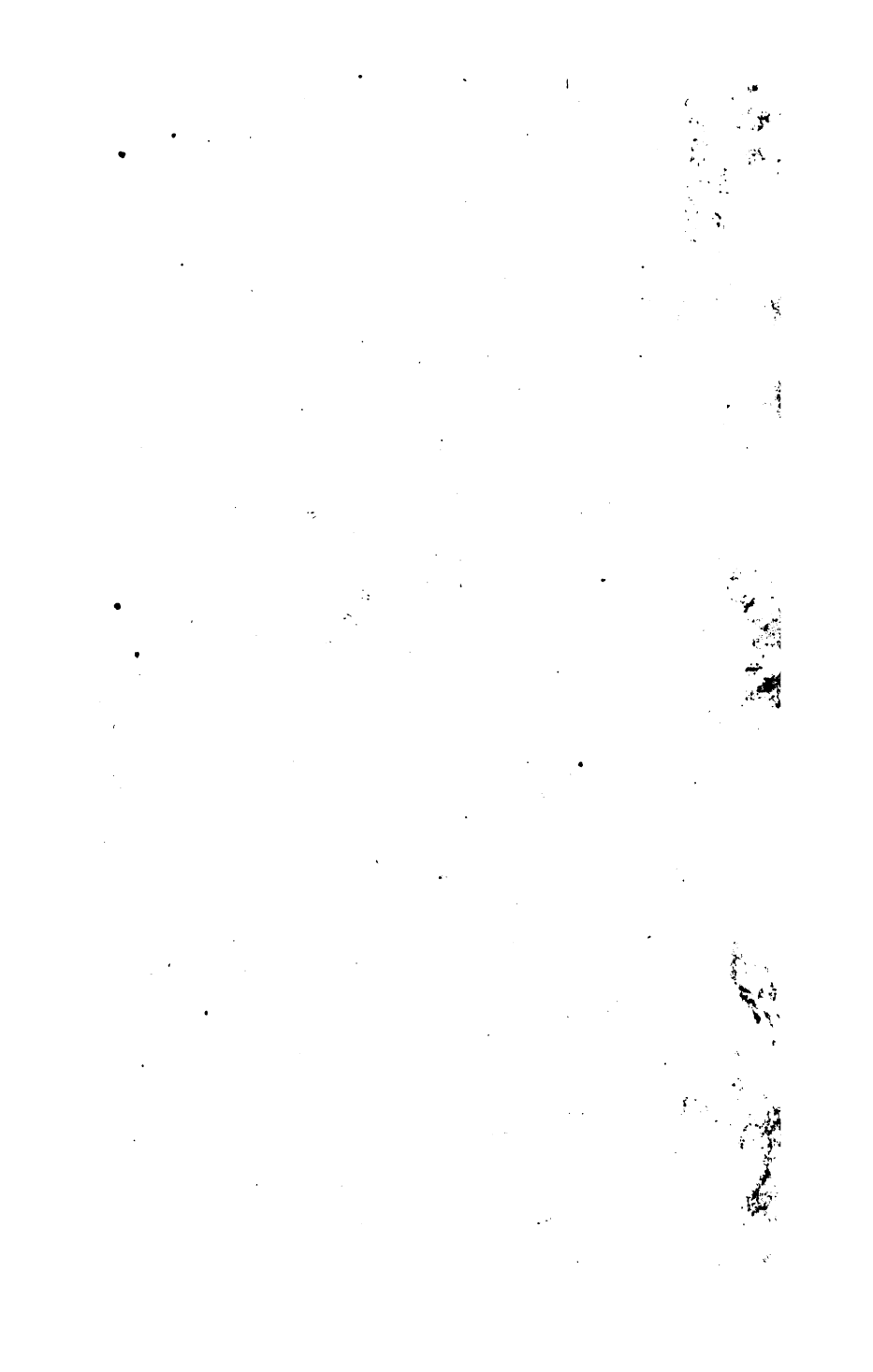


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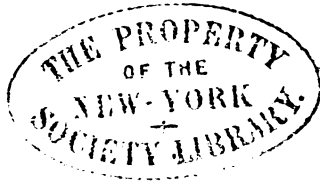
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THEY CALL IT LOVE

By

FRANK FRANKFORT MOORE

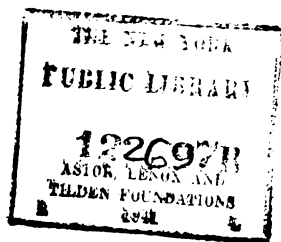
AUTHOR OF "I FORBID THE
BANNS," "A GRAY EYE OR
SO," "DAIREEN," ETC., ETC.



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1895

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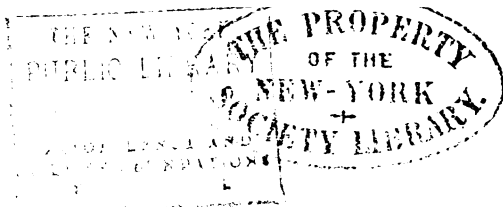
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THEY CALL IT LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

ON CONFECTIONS.

"WE have now come to the end of our very pleasant and, I would fain hope, not wholly unprofitable journey along the primrose path of poetry—the poetry of our beloved Master Shakespere. We have also given some consideration to that scheme of philosophy known as the Baconian. We have examined together the various coincidences both as regards form and thought which occur in the works attributed to Shakespere and those attributed to Bacon, and I think that *the only possible conclusion* that can be come to by sane minds—minds well balanced—minds not given to be carried away by the foolish and extravagant theories of such persons as seem to aim only at the destruction of previously unquestioned truths—the *only possible conclusion that can be come to is*, I think I may assert without fear of contradiction, that the works attributed to Bacon were written by Shakespere."

Mr. Glossop, M.A. Oxon., smiled indulgently—almost pleasantly—around his audience in the lecture-room as he straightened out the typoscript on his desk, preparatory to returning it to his leather case. Mr. Glossop was very well satisfied with himself, and when one is satisfied with one's self one is usually satisfied with the people who are around one—that is, of course, satisfied that they are greatly inferior to one's self. Mr. Glossop, M.A. Oxon., University Extension Lecturer, understood something of the art of pyrotechny in literature, or rather in lecturing, which is not exactly the same thing; he knew that the commonplaces of a series of lectures can be relieved by a single startling

phrase at the close. (So the professional pyrotechnist burns profitless powder for half an hour, and by a judicious flight of rockets at the close, sends his spectators home to the strains of the National Anthem feeling that they have got the worth of their money, and that a monarchy is the best possible form of government. So the master of that form of mystification known as oratory cherishes a peroration.)

When Mr. Glossop smiled his audience closed their notebooks and looked at one another's hats, estimating their probable cost and duration,—it was for this they had attended the course of Mr. Glossop's lectures, so that, indeed, it had not been wholly profitless.

While in the act of departing, those of the girls who were acquainted chatted together upon various topics radiating from the smile of Mr. Glossop. Two—they were elderly, but not without hope—went so far as to talk even of the lecture.

"I'm glad they're over," said one girl with red hair, which was usually much admired except by other girls with red hair. "I'm glad they're over. Charlie is back."

"And you think that he will——" came the diminuendo whisper, dwindling into a note of interrogation—which is not sounded—of her companion.

"He said he would."

"Ah!"

"And I don't see why papa shouldn't give his consent now . . . three hundred a year!"

"I'm sure you'll do your best, dear."

"I mean to. So would you, Hetty, if you had the chance."

"We can't all have red hair, dear."

And they walked away together smiling.

"I'm glad they're over," said a young woman whose brain had run into a fringe on her forehead. "I'm glad they're done. My 'Hamlet' has broken his spinal cord, poor old chappie!"

She had no brothers, and so fancied that "chappie" was the latest form of the affectionate diminutive. She showed her tattered hand-book—it contained all that was proper in "Hamlet"—to her friend.

"I'm sorry they're over," said her friend, a very young with her hair flowing down her back—some people said



she was too old to wear her hair in that absurd style; others began to talk about a literary prize that she had won, but ended by talking of her hair. "I'm sorry they're over."

She tried, with but indifferent success, to stifle a sigh.

"Oh, of course, we all know that," said her companion.

"How do you all know?"

"By intuition, dear, and observation, dearie."

"And what do you all know?"

"That Mr. Glossop smiles—yes, now and again. Why should you blush?"

"I don't."

"You do. Do you blush for Mr. Glossop's smile, or does he smile because you blush?"

"We'll have to catch the tram-car."

"If the lectures had gone on much longer, I'd have ruined myself over chocolate creams," said the eldest of a set of three girls,—the eldest was twenty and the youngest seventeen.

"I'd rather have fondants," said the eldest. "What was that he said about Shakespere and Byron?"

"Bacon—Shakespere and Bacon," said the youngest.

"Bacon? I thought it was Byron. I thought he said that Shakespere had written Byron's poems."

"No, Bacon's Essays."

"But Bacon's Essays aren't poetry."

"I suppose not."

"Haven't you read them?"

"I suppose I have. I've forgotten things that were twice as good as them."

"Including the elements of English grammar. But if they're in prose how could Shakespere write them? Shakespere couldn't write prose."

"I wish I'd all the chocolate creams that I ate since we began the lecture course."

"I wish that I had as good a turnout as that of Sir George Anderson," said the second of the group of three. She had not yet spoken. Spiteful persons tried to spoil her chances in life by calling her thoughtful, because she talked so little. She was not thoughtful—only lazy.

"You'll have one if you annex a man who can make money," said the eldest girl.

The second girl was silent.

"Of course, we all expect to do that," remarked the

youngest. "But doesn't Shakespere or somebody say 'Man proposes'?"

"Yes; but man doesn't," said the eldest. "At least . . . Do you think Miss Talbot pretty?"

"No, not pretty—gloriously handsome," cried the youngest, with all the enthusiasm of a girl talking about another—an enthusiasm that sometimes dies out or, what is more deplorable, becomes artistic. When art takes the place of enthusiasm in a woman's praise of another woman's beauty, the result is sad.

"I don't think her so wonderful," said the eldest. "It's because she takes Lily Cosway so much about with her that people think her so handsome. Lily makes a capital foil. I heard Mrs. Richardson say the other day that choosing a foil was everything."

"But Lily Cosway is pretty herself."

"Of course; but in another way. She's so fair and fluffy that she sets people admiring the brown hair and grey eyes of Miss Talbot—very ordinary grey eyes and very ordinary brown hair. Mrs. Richardson said that the art of choosing foils should be taught at school—that it's the most important part of a girl's education."

"Rubbish!" cried the youngest. "Who would be such a fool as to make a bosom friend of a nasty girl simply because her black hair made one's fair hair look fairer? And what about the foils? Aren't they to have a voice in the matter? Are the plain ones to lend themselves to the good-looking ones in order that the good-looking ones may appear better looking still?"

"Mrs. Richardson says that no girl thinks she's plain," said the eldest.

"Oh, we all know that as well as Mrs. Richardson," cried the youngest. "Your Mrs. Richardson doesn't know everything."

"She's been married nine years, anyway, and has spent five of them in India," said the eldest.

CHAPTER II.

ON REFLECTIONS.

WHILE the various members of the ladies' class of the University Extension Lecture Course at Weighborough were gracefully dispersing, some to catch tram-cars, and others to do a little shopping—chiefly at the confectioner's—the carriage containing Minna Talbot and Lily Cosway was being driven through the town—the unlovely town of Weighborough—and before the three girls, whose chat has just been faithfully recorded, had made their selection of confections, it had crossed the bridge on its way to Ashdown.

The two girls had attended the course of lectures delivered by Mr. Glossop; and when Mr. Glossop had given his farewell smile, it was clearly understood by all the young ladies present that he meant it to radiate from the seats which were occupied by Miss Talbot and Miss Cosway. No one would venture to doubt the right of Miss Talbot and Miss Cosway to be made the centre of any system of smile-distribution that might be devised; and Mr. Glossop, having had the benefit of a university education—not a University Extension education—would have been the last to call in question their privilege in this respect.

In a lecture-room it is, of course, clearly understood that personal beauty counts for nothing. Beauty, not exactly of the soul, but of the intellect, is what counts—yes, next to a faithful memory for dates and an accurate appreciation of the Subjunctive Mood—but during the last five minutes of a course of lectures on the Great Elizabethan Writers it was understood that social prestige might, without impropriety, be recognised by a tactful and tasteful lecturer. Mr. Glossop was both tactful and tasteful.

Miss Talbot was in the habit of driving to the weekly lecture in a carriage with two well-matched horses, and with a footman sitting beside the coachman, in chocolate livery faced with scarlet. In no town in the kingdom do such indications of the possession of money count for more than in Weighborough. A self-made man is a man who has made

himself wealthy at the expense of other men; but only a self-made man fully appreciates the difficulty of the task: the other men are becoming so knowing, they can be got the better of only with great exertion. Now, Weighborough, being a self-made community, knew perfectly well that a carriage drawn by a pair of well-matched horses cannot be maintained except at a considerable expense, and as the spending of money must mean (they believed) the possession of money, they held in high esteem, as do all sensible people, and several others, nowadays, the persons who drive about behind well-matched horses.

Miss Talbot's guardian was one of the most prosperous and, consequently, most highly respected of the Weighborough merchants. He showed his fellow-citizens that he had a keen appreciation of the importance of his position as a Weighborough merchant. He had never been known to make a jest. He knew that a man who never makes a jest will never be made a jest of.

He had at one time been Mayor of Weighborough; and, having shown himself thoroughly unscrupulous in the use he had made of his power at the head of the Municipality to forward the interests of the Government then in office, he had been knighted. He was Sir George Anderson—a widower of, perhaps, a year or two over sixty.

As for Minna Talbot, his ward, it was clearly understood in Weighborough that both she and her brother, Gerald, had a considerable amount of money. Would Sir George Anderson be their guardian if they had not each a fortune? people asked—people who knew Sir George Anderson very well, indeed. Gerald Talbot was a painter who had already exhibited some singular works at those galleries in London where some singular works can be examined several times in the course of the year. He had studied in Paris, it was generally known; but not much more was known about him in Weighborough beyond the one commanding fact of his having a fortune of his own. It is impossible to interest the people of Weighborough in a question of Art in any form; but so soon as one speaks of fortunes in money, they become enthralled.

Gerald Talbot appeared but seldom at his guardian's fine place, known as The Tower, at Ashdown, that picturesque village eight miles from Weighborough, through which three or four of the merchants hoped to slip into the county by

building mansions in the neighbourhood. Now and again, however, he visited the place and occupied the little studio which had been built in a secluded part of the grounds where one might expect a summer-house to stand.

It was believed that he detested Weighborough. But why he should do so the citizens were at a loss to say.

One of them suggested that Paris was accountable for this, as it was for a large number of other peculiar tastes on the part of men who were otherwise unobjectionable. Gerald Talbot had studied at Paris. He was a fool, the people said: he should have gone into business at Weighborough, and have aimed at the Mayoralty, and then a brilliant bankruptcy. Weighborough had from time to time produced some eminent bankrupts, and at intervals some very ingenious commercial frauds had been perpetrated by the most religious of its citizens.

Lily Cosway, the pretty girl with the fair hair and fresh face, who had attended the course of University Extension Lectures and was now driving away from the last of the series by the side of Miss Talbot, was the only child of Mr. Harold Cosway, the historian of the Second Century. Mr. Cosway lived in a very roomy and picturesque house which he called a cottage, at Ashdown, and this circumstance had done more to make the name of Ashdown known throughout the world than all the incidents connected with the residences of the Weighborough merchants in the neighbourhood.

People came from Boston to stand with their arms resting on the wooden gate leading into Mr. Cosway's garden; and from Chicago to carve their names on the woodwork as a token of their sympathy with Mr. Cosway's labours—for four able-bodied lecturers were constantly travelling through the United States making the people acquainted with the achievements of Mr. Cosway. The Weighborough residents in the neighbourhood of Ashdown could not quite understand why people should come from afar to gaze at a humble cottage of two stories and to carve their names on the simple wooden gate at the entrance to the garden, when a mile further on they might catch glimpses of the mansion of an ex-Mayor of Weighborough, and run the risk of a prosecution by cutting their names on the great elm that stood on a mound just outside one of the lodges.

But Boston and Chicago understood.

The carriage of the ex-Mayor of Weighborough had passed over a mile or two of the road leading to Ashdown, and the mansion on the one hand and the cottage on the other, before Lily Cosway spoke to her friend.

"Thank goodness, it's all over! Thank goodness, we have seen the last of that man's smile! I don't think I could stand another of his smiles, Minna," she said.

"He means well, Lily," said Minna.

"If there's a place where good intentions take the place of asphalt, the people who lay down the pavement are the people who mean well," said Lily. "To say that a man means well is nearly as bad as calling a girl good-natured."

"But he never smiled except when he was at the point of finishing a lecture, and then it was only a little one."

"That was the excuse made by a young woman in one of Captain Marryat's books. It wasn't accepted as an excuse. Oh, Minna, I'm so sick of Shakespere—the Shakespere of the University Extensioner—about as like the real Shakespere as Sir Thomas Lawrence's picture of Wellington is like the Duke of the tuppenny damn. I'm sick of Hamlet—all shuffle and soliloquy. I'm sick of the Descent of Man—the descent to the ground from the upper branches, when the wagging parts grew weak and the walking parts grew strong: that's Evolution in a nutshell."

"Good gracious, Lily, do you mean to say that you're sick of education?"

"No, not of education, only of learning. People get rid of their education to make way for their learning, I've been thinking for some time past. Thank Heaven, all my courses of lectures haven't been quite able to keep me from thinking."

"If you have no saner thoughts than those, I'm sure your father will wish that the lectures had done a little more. What on earth has put those notions into your curly head, my dear?"

"Sense—instinct—the natural woman—Eve. Oh, yes; I've been working out the whole problem of the most recent form of man and the most recent form of woman. They're all the same inside as they ever were. The difference between the past and the present is only the difference between a watch in a gold case and one in a silver case—the works are the same in both."

"You've certainly gone into the subject, but with what object?"

"With what object? Why, the mapping out a future for myself and, incidentally, a future for woman generally."

"That is an excellent object, certainly, my dearest. And have you yet laid out the parallels on your map?"

"I've done that, if little beyond it. Long ago, when I didn't take kindly to my school-books, my school-mistress took me aside, I remember, and talked to me very seriously about my future. How could I expect to take my place in society if I was conscious of not knowing the date of the Norman Conquest or the age of Queen Elizabeth when she died. I was given to understand that it would be quite impossible for me to go out to tea with respectable people so long as I couldn't tell at a moment's notice how the Wars of the Roses were brought about—for a time I might smile and pretend to know, but it would be impossible for me to keep up the deception for long. I would be tripped up some day and exposed, while society made a mock of me."

"And that was how you were induced to allow yourself to be educated?"

"Yes. I could not endure the thought of being held up to ridicule, especially as I knew that a girl whom I hated—her name was Amy something, and she was the paragon of the school: a pert little thing with a simper, who always said 'It is I' at the proper times—yes, I felt sure that she would be the first to betray my ignorance to the world. I was given to understand that the Norman Conquest and the age of Queen Elizabeth were the most popular topics in drawing-rooms."

"And you have just discovered that you were deceived?"

"Minna, I have lent myself to the deception until to-day; but I will be deceived no longer. Do you know how many spinsters there are to every single man in the United Kingdom alone?"

"No, I certainly don't."

"You should be ashamed to confess it. Minna, the disproportion between the sexes is the foundation of all the great problems of the day."

"You have found out that that's what's talked of in drawing-rooms just now, instead of the Wars of the Roses?"

"I have. Minna, it is my duty to tell you that the higher education—so called—of Women is responsible for the decay of marriage. The problem is the Decay of Marriage, and its Cause."

"That's the title in full?"

"Yes; I've come to the conclusion that the higher education is accountable for the decay of marriage. We have been educated out of our need for husbands, just as papa has been educated out of the need for Gibbon, or you for a French Dictionary. We are made to prepare ourselves for spinsterhood instead of motherhood."

"Oh, Lily!"

"Oh, people speak very plainly now-a-days. Why shouldn't they? Yes, I've come to the conclusion that we've been taught too much to rely upon our own resources for our happiness in the future. Woman has been taught to be independent. That's the great mistake. She should be taught dependence—yes, dependence upon man. There's nothing so good for a girl as to be happily married—now, is there?"

"Happiness is happiness, whether it comes through being married or through graceful spinsterhood."

"Of course; but from the Voice that breathed o'er Eden until the present day, the happiness of marriage is acknowledged to be greater than the felicity of an honourable spinsterhood. And yet our education places us no nearer that desirable goal. But that's not all—I say that it places us further away from it; but we needn't discuss that—it's only a point."

"I don't feel quite prepared to discuss it. You see, I haven't been studying the Problem."

"I can't blame you. I didn't begin to study it myself until quite a short time ago. I only studied the problems in 'Hamlet,' and the philology. I see my way clearly now, however."

"And where does it lead to?"

"It's not *where*—where is neuter; it's *whom*, and whom is masculine—yes, sometimes."

"What can you possibly mean, Lily? You have got very deep and very dark."

"You only think so because you haven't been studying the problem. What I mean to do is to make a bonfire of my books and to study man—yes, as the gamekeeper studies the pheasant—as the trapper studies the beaver."

"This is very awful, Lily dear; I don't think you should talk in this way."

"I daresay—so we've been taught for years and years—that's what I say: we've been taught everything except the

one thing needful, which is The Man and How to Attract Him. Now I mean to give myself up to that study, for I've come to the conclusion that our happiness—our success in life is almost wholly dependent upon our progress in that branch of knowledge. Really, when you come to think of it, there's hardly anything else worth studying in the world."

She spoke so seriously that Minna Talbot burst out laughing. Lily's seriousness seemed absurdly inconsistent with the extreme fairness of her hair and the childishness of her face.

"You are getting more terrible every minute," said Minna.

"Yes, but I'm getting more interesting, too," said Lily. "It's rather sad, isn't it? that the more terrible things are the more interesting they become. How do you account for that? Was it the Fall, do you suppose?"

"Good gracious, Lily, do you mean to try and draw me into the consideration of your philosophy and problems and things?"

Lily paused and looked with laughing eyes at the calm face of the girl beside her.

"I wonder if it is possible that you know a good deal more about these same problems than I do, Minna?" she said, at last.

"I know nothing about any problems, my dear," said Minna, with perhaps the least little roseate tint slipping over her face. "Nothing—except, of course, those about the triangles that we learned at school; 'two sides of a triangle are greater than the third,' you know."

"I do know. And I've also heard that the triangle is an emblem of life. It's an emblem of the united life of man and woman. The two sides are man, and they are greater than the remaining side, woman; but all the same the remaining side is absolutely necessary to make up the complete triangle. The human mind, Mr. Glossop told us, is capable of grasping almost any idea; it is; but it has not yet been able to evolve a triangle with only two sides."

"And what does all this lead up to?"

"Not what—*whom*: the masculine whom. I heard a few days ago that Mr. Clifford is coming to Ash Court next week."

"What on earth——"

"Nothing on earth, my beloved. Marriages are made in heaven."

"You actually mean——"

"Yes, if I'm clever enough. I doubt if I am, though. If I'd been taught the art—if I'd given up half the time to it that I've given to 'Hamlet'—I'd have more confidence in myself. It's not so easy getting oneself up on any subject so as to be able to make a creditable professional appearance in the course of a week or so. However, I must only do my best. Oh, why weren't we taught the art years ago,—the art that is a combination of all the arts, and so should be placed above every one of them?"

"Perhaps it was because it cannot be acquired by much study, my Lilyflower. But take courage. I have ample confidence in your ability to learn."

"You mistake the willingness for the capacity, Minna. No, no; I shall have to cram for the work. I shall have to scamp it, I know, and the prize will go to someone who has graduated in the art—someone who won't love him half as well as I would."

"Love—love him—*him!* Lily, this is dreadful: a man whom you have never seen!"

"Why dreadful? I'm sure it's a good deal easier loving the unseen than the seen. That's why poets should never be photographed. Here we are at home. Do—do think over what I've been saying, and let me know to-morrow if you've found a flaw in my reasoning."

"Reasoning? Reasoning? Ah, good-bye. Drop over to lunch to-morrow, as early as you please, and we'll drive to The Firs."

"We shall talk it all over."

"No, no; you may talk: I can only promise to listen."

The wooden gate, carved with the names of the Chicago pilgrims, was reached by the carriage; the footman held the door open, and Lily got out after kissing her friend. She said, "Thank you, William," to the footman, as he unfastened her gate for her, and he thanked her for her thanks with a respectful motion of his hand to the brim of his hat.

She walked through the garden up to her father's cottage.

CHAPTER III.

ON RETROSPECTIONS.

WHEN Lily Cosway was laying aside her hat in her own room she could not help thinking that perhaps she had talked too fast and in too erratic a way to her friend Minna. Lily had now and again an uneasy consciousness of talking too fast and too unreservedly. Her preceptresses had from the earliest of her school-days given a considerable amount of study to the best means of increasing this consciousness on her part. They had occasionally been successful.

Everyone knows that the force of the conviction of sin is proportionate to the disagreeable consequences of the sin that has been committed. When Lily Cosway got into a scrape through the rapidity with which she talked, she felt rather more remorse for her indiscretion than she did when she was only blamed, on principle, by the ladies who had undertaken the charge of her manners and her spine—the ladies who controlled her pronunciation in three languages and prevented her from crouching over a desk. They assured her that erratic speech, even when the Subjunctive Mood was carefully attended to, was reprehensible. Of course when the Subjunctive Mood was set at naught—as it usually was by Lily—another wash of black was added to the fundamental evil.

But Lily continued to fly in the face of Providence and the Subjunctive Mood so long as she did not get into any scrape thereby. It was, as has already been stated, when she could not evade a scrape that she had a becoming conviction of sin under the statute of her Catechism. She then felt that for her own comfort's sake erratic speech on her part should be subjected to a severe control. But the spiritual gendarmerie entrusted with this duty was too indifferently trained to become efficient at a moment's notice, and the result was usually failure.

Her preceptresses tried the experiment of putting her conscience upon a stimulating diet. They had heard that wonders had been done in certain cases where the conscience of

a young woman had exhibited anæmic tendencies. It might be, they thought, that a course of iron would do Miss Cosway's some good. They brought her within the sphere of influence, so to speak, of the spiritual tonics that were every week administered by an earnest, consequently, a young, clergyman, who preached in a church in the neighbourhood of the school.

This dietetic experiment was not a remarkable success. Her conscience was not stimulated by the preacher. Her powers of satire were, for she referred, even in the presence of a school-mistress, and in terms that suggested the lemon rather than the peach, to the affectations of delivery of the preacher, and to the affectations of attention of the young women who sat in rows beneath him.

"Pretending that they see in the flappings of the baggy sleeves of his surplice the early movements of an angel's wings," said Lily. She had a fine scorn of young women who cultivated sentiment to the strains of the Processional Hymn.

It was very shocking to the preceptresses to find that they had not only failed in their purpose in regard to Miss Cosway's conscience, but had actually intensified the evil which they desired to abate. They were discouraged; and after a time it seemed as if they had come to the conclusion, without any actual conference on the subject among themselves, that it might be as wise for them to give all their attention to the development of the young lady's studies, and to maintaining the perfect uprightness of her spine. In both respects their efforts were highly successful. The rapidity with which she acquired knowledge was certainly equal to that which was displayed by the most advanced of her sister-pupils; and she had, in addition, a faculty for retaining the knowledge which she acquired. This was a power which had previously been unknown among the young ladies, and Lily's possession of it was regarded with something akin to suspicion. It was generally felt, after a discussion among the young ladies in one of the class-rooms, that Lily Cosway was endowed with a faculty of very doubtful value. It stood to reason, they said, that the human brain could only contain a certain amount of knowledge. The faculty for forgetting much that was acquired by a girl was a beneficent provision of nature—usually unkind to the sex—and it was of practically universal distribution. Most girls could forget

things very gracefully, they said: the one who retained her knowledge should be looked upon with suspicion. She was unladylike; so much could scarcely be disputed, though as a winner of scholarships it might be unwise to ignore her.

Lily was made aware of the judgment of the Synod upon her, and she declared that girls were the nastiest of things created.

Having arrived at this conclusion, she had the less compunction pocketing all the school prizes. She did so without trouble. Then she took an important scholarship at the University, and her portrait appeared in all the illustrated papers.

Men said that it was a shame for so pretty a girl to bother herself learning anything. It was all very well for the gloomy-browed ones to worry themselves over the developments of the binominal theorem and the discovery of a practicable coefficient of x in the problem of the increase of the temperature of fluids in motion—that was the subject of the essay for which Miss Cosway had won a prize. For a pretty girl, and so her photograph—allowing for the gradual decrease in clearness due to reproduction in block form—showed her to be, to sit in a lecture-room in front of black-boards was as ridiculous as chartering the winner of the America Cup to carry a cargo of coals across the Atlantic. It was well enough for the gloomy-browed ones, they repeated—those who were compelled to hang their rooms with the cheapest Japanese fans procurable in order to show that they had something feminine about them after all (the feminine affection for the half-penny fan); but for a girl with a delicately poised head . . . oh, the idea was ridiculous.

But Lily Cosway's father only smiled that grim smile of his which has for years been familiar to the purchaser of the photographs of celebrities—the philosopher's smile—when he heard, first, through the medium of a letter written in the inflexible style of the professional grammarian, of the rapidity and the erratic character of his daughter's comments on all matters; and, secondly, of the comments that were made by men (and by women who had got all their daughters happily married) upon the incongruity of the girl's adoption of a course of prize-winning while her head was gracefully poised upon her shoulders.

He loved his child dearly: he had solved more than one

difficult problem in history by a careful observation of his daughter's character. He studied her philosophically, and experimented upon her. She was invaluable to him as a model. Every man who might have history-writing aspirations should, he said, have a daughter for experimental purposes. A wife was fair enough as a preliminary; but wives were not altogether satisfactory, except so far as they suggested the solution of the questions that were constantly cropping up in the consideration of the doings of the wives of history. But a daughter was undoubtedly the more valuable literary "property," so to speak. Was she not a working model of woman? Any man desirous of studying with some frequency the operations of a locomotive would be a fool to have a complete engine built in his back-yard: a working model would answer his purpose in every respect, and it was much safer besides. Mr. Cosway gave a good deal of observation to his daughter with the most profitable results (professionally) to himself.

He fancied that he was beginning to understand something of the development of woman, and so he was—beginning.

He had never sought to influence the girl in any way. He had never given her a father's advice on any subject. He had never sent her to stand with her face to the wall when she had behaved badly during her childhood—those hours of her childhood which she was permitted to spend in his society. He had told her that she might learn the thing called Catechism if she pleased: it could do her no harm. Likewise the Bible: it contained no doctrine of any sort, so could not corrupt her.

When she learned to read—she was then about five years old—he allowed her the freedom of his library. She asked him what she should read. He told her to read everything. And she did.

He watched her, and he heard patiently her criticism of the ancients. He answered every question that she asked of him, and encouraged her to talk in that rapid and erratic style which her school-mistresses deplored.

He urged her to be natural. That was the only advice he gave her. She would be of no use to him as a working model unless she was natural. She took his advice, and even the preceptresses of deportment could not make her otherwise than natural.

Her prize-winning was at first a great blow to him. He feared that she would develop, not into a woman, but into a scholar; in which case she would be of no use to him. He understood enough about the development of a scholar to last him for the rest of his life. But when she paid him a visit of a week every two months, and he failed to detect the least departure from her early naturalness, he was greatly pleased. After all, there was not much harm in winning scholarships, he thought.

He gave her a free hand in every respect, and when, through her faculty for retaining all knowledge that she acquired, her name appeared in the lists as equal to the third wrangler, and a new series of her portraits appeared in the illustrated papers, she said that she thought that she would try a month or two at home to see what it was like. She went home, and her father gave her a hearty welcome. He even permitted her to attend with her friend Minna Talbot the literature class of the University Extension branch at Weighborough. Minna's guardian had asked Minna to attend the course. He had given a handsome subscription to the University Extension scheme, and he was anxious to get the credit of encouraging the excellent work by making his ward participate in its benefits.

Did Mr. Cosway receive a great shock when his daughter announced to him, just before sitting down to dinner, that it was her intention to give up all study and to devote herself to another sort of life?

"Great heavens!" cried the historian. "Great heavens! Have you seen a man?"

He was not altogether ignorant on the subject of woman. There were women in the Second Century. Besides, he had read a good deal of the history of the world, if his writings were confined to one period.

CHAPTER IV.

ON RESOLUTION.

"HAVE you seen a man?" Mr. Cosway asked once more when he and his daughter were alone after dinner.

"No," said Lily, "I haven't seen him—no, not yet. But I expect to see him shortly. I'll be greatly disappointed if I don't see him."

"And you are interested in him without knowing what his face is like?" said the father.

"Undoubtedly I am."

"Or his figure? He may be a student. I hope he's not a student."

"I don't think I'm quite a goose, papa."

"No, no; not quite—not quite. You are the most admirable young woman whom I ever met. I am glad to know that it is possible for a woman to be ready to change at the impulse of her imagination the career which she has planned for herself. It is an illumination. I regard it as an illumination. I wonder if you could tell me how you feel exactly."

"I don't think I could. I don't think I quite know. I'm not sure if the feeling of discontent at the smallness of the value of books and study was not the first step. But the last step was, I know, the foolishness of Mr. Glossop's lectures on 'Hamlet.' The lecture that we heard to-day brought my feelings to a climax. While he was droning away I was thinking how pleasant it would be to be the head of such a house as the Court."

"Oh! The Court."

"Exactly. The head of that house, and to be able to drive about in furs in the winter, and to give garden-parties, wearing something in the brocaded silk way in the summer—something light, you know, but good—so good as to make everyone who knew anything talk about how good it was—you understand?"

"Perfectly—perfectly—Faustina."

"Faustina?—papa?"

"I beg your pardon, my dear. I must make a note. 'Faustina'—that will be sufficient for my purpose. Now go on."

"I've no more to say. I've told you all that I feel—at least all that can be expressed."

"Then tell me all that can't be expressed. Everything that can't be expressed is interesting."

He spoke with great seriousness; and perhaps this was why she threw herself back on her cushions and laughed loud and long.

Her father waited. His notes included a chapter on the "Moods of Women."

"What I cannot express is what it was that led me into that particular line of thought. Why on earth should I begin to see the hollowness of books?"

"That is the most interesting point. And then what did you think about—the Court?"

"Oh, dear, no. Let me see. Yes, I felt that reading books was not life—making them may be."

"It's not. And then?"

"Well, then I felt that I should like to live—yes, yes, that I should like to have a week of life—real life—no books—no study—no—no girls. Oh, I got to hate the sight of a girl—even Minna."

"Quite right. And then you thought of the Court?"

"Not for ever so long after. I began to think of all the lines of life that I would like to live, and I was amazed and ashamed—yes, for a while—to find that every scheme of life that commended itself to me was governed by a husband. It actually seemed as if I were on a level with a housemaid, who wants someone to take her out for Sunday walks. How horrid!"

"I never was so much interested in my life. 'Just like a housemaid,' you say?"

"Oh, don't harp on my humiliation, papa."

Her face was now rosy; she turned it away from her father and buried it in a cushion on the unsympathetic arm of the sofa on which she sat.

He waited. His face had not changed: it still wore that grim philosophical smile, which conveyed so much irritation to the people whom it penetrated, and which called for the weak remonstrances of the men who photographed him for business purposes, at the order of his publishers. The

photographer's smile is essentially different from the philosopher's smile.

He waited.

She looked up, after a while, rosier than ever.

"I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself," said she, meekly. "Ah, I've no mother."

"That is the sadness of it," said he. "But would a mother understand you more fully than I do?"

"Ah," she breathed. The smile that was upon her face was the smile of the human being who pities the philosopher.

"Would a mother study you as I have studied you?" said her father.

"No—no—no! She would not have studied me. She would have known me."

"Yes—you think so? Ah, that is another phase of the—the—growth of the woman. It is a very ordinary phase, however—the desire for an ear. It is not exclusively a woman's—it comes to men as well, unless they are of a peculiar temperament. You can tell me no more?"

"There is nothing more to tell. I have made you feel that I'm very horrid—I feel that I am horrid, indeed."

"Why should you think it so horrid to have grown into a woman? I'm greatly afraid, my dear, that you've been paying some attention to what your preceptresses have told you. I didn't expect that of you, my child."

"I don't require anyone to tell me how horrid I've been—I know it. And the worst of it is that I've told Minna all, and she'll be thinking just now all the bad things that I think about myself."

"I daresay. But could you have helped yourself?"

"Could I have helped myself? Of course I could, if I hadn't been such an idiot. Why on earth should I have begun telling her all that I did—all that I have told you—yes, and more, for I told her that I had made up my mind to marry Mr. Clifford of the Court?"

Once again the rosy face was buried in the cushion, and once again the historian waited in grim silence.

The moment that the girl looked up—her eyes were glistening—he said—

"I wonder if Minna Talbot has also made up her mind to marry that Mr. Clifford whom you have never seen?"

"Minna Talbot! How could such an idea occur to you, papa? She would never think of such a thing—oh, never.

There is nothing so horrid about her—nothing of the housemaid and her young man.”

“Then she is the less womanly.”

“At any rate she would never be so foolish as I have been—she would never go about telling everyone she met that she had made up her mind to marry a man whom she had never seen.”

“That may be true. I’m glad she’s not my daughter. She’d be of very little use to me as a study.”

“Oh, girls want to be loved and not studied. We are not rotifera to be put between two slips of glass and examined with the strongest object-glass screwed on the microscope and a man’s eye at the other end.”

She had sprung to her feet and was walking to and fro in some degree of excitement. Her father perceived with great interest the development of this further phase of her mood. Only for a moment he had an impulse—it was not a very strong one—to put his arms about his daughter and induce her to lay her tearful face upon his chest while he kissed her forehead. He had no great difficulty controlling this impulse. He felt that it would be fatal to his further observation of her mood, and he had yet much to learn—he knew it.

Instead of yielding to his impulse, he said—

“But you’ve made up your mind to have done with your books—so much is certain?”

“Nothing could be more certain. Ah, I am deadly sick of learning things. I want to have a chance of feeling—feeling—living—being in the world—doing what the people in the world do. What on earth could have induced me to take all the trouble to read books and to work out mathematical problems that mean no more than a game of cards—a good deal less than many games of cards? How was I ever so foolish as to fancy that there was any use in knowing all about the increase in temperature of fluids in motion? Oh, I have learned nothing except the solution of puzzles—puzzles in mathematics, puzzles in chemistry, puzzles in metres—all puzzles! I had a head for puzzles, they found out, and they kept me at them, and told me that I was doing good work. Good work! Why, the girls who make dresses do better work than I ever did. The girls who make shirts—dear little shirts for baby boys—sweet little chubby chaps—you know?”

"I know; I've seen them—mostly in pictorial advertisements: they want the soap."

"Pretty little chaps! Don't you love them, papa?"

"I'm not in the soap business, my dear."

"Oh, you've no thought for anything later than the Second Century. Cipriani knew what children were; so did Sir Joshua Reynolds. I see that now, though I must confess that I did think the National Gallery a bore."

"What imports this nomination of a gentleman—in little?"

"Oh, don't quote 'Hamlet'—quote anything but 'Hamlet'—that awful course of lectures—Glossop! He can prove that it was Shakespere who wrote Bacon's Essays. That's the sort of good work that Glossop turns out. It would be better to be a mechanic, an engine-driver—they do real work in the world; but I—what was I talking about?"

"The influence of Eighteenth Century art on a Nineteenth Century woman cultivating a heart."

"Eighteenth Century—Nineteenth Century—a heart! Ah, my dear papa, the heart is being educated out of the Nineteenth Century woman. Men hate us."

"That is what you feel? Are you quite sure that that is what you feel? I wish I could be certain that you are accurately describing your symptoms. They are an illumination upon certain episodes in history."

"The burning of my books will be an illumination, at any rate."

"When are you going to burn them? I should like to stand by and see you do it. I never saw a book burning."

"You'll see some before you sleep. I'll make the bonfire in the garden. I daresay it will suggest mediæval Rome to you. They have burnt a lot of books in Rome from time to time."

"Not enough—not enough. Give me due notice. It's a fine evening for burning a library. Would you think it well to send a message to your friend Minna Talbot to join our garden-party to-night?"

"On no account. She wouldn't allow me to burn a single book—not even Tate's problems, the most diabolic of all. She wouldn't understand the poetry of the action."

"Oh, the poetry of the action?"

"The symbolism, I mean. She wouldn't understand that I don't burn them out of spite—only as a symbol of my re-

nunciation of the past—the profitless past. Wasn't there a picture of the Renunciation of Saint Elizabeth—she was shown kneeling before an altar: she had just unmade her toilet. No one could doubt that it was very distasteful for a queen to go through that ceremony; but she thought of the value of the symbolism and was sustained. They made her a saint. They were right."

"I have heard the story. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary was a woman before she became a saint. Perhaps she was one even afterwards. I wonder if she had in her eye the treatment of the scene pictorially. Never mind, my dear; we'll accept, without considering it too curiously, the symbolism of your action."

"I renounce the pomps and vanities of the student and I embrace the world—the world in which men and women live."

She sprang into her father's arms, and he kissed her on the chin with great tenderness. He usually kissed her on the forehead and with no particular tenderness.

CHAPTER V.

ON RENUNCIATION.

WHEN Mr. Cosway found himself suddenly alone in the room, he became more thoughtful than he usually was when outside his own study, for he did not carry the historian with him into his daughter's drawing-room.

His only instruction to his daughter had ever been that she should remain natural. Well, she had followed his instruction. She had never spoken to him otherwise than naturally. She had never pretended to him that she liked to read those Greek tragedians whom he knew perfectly well to be the greatest bores in ancient Greece—the habitat, so to speak, of bores, whether they called themselves philosophers or tragedians. She had never pretended to have a passion for putting good English verses into very indifferent Greek verses; but she had never rebelled against her master's orders, *either in respect of the tragedians or the translations.*

She had done well every task that had been allotted to her; and she had won great fame for her teachers and a trifle for herself. In the matter of passing examinations, the one who passes is held in small esteem in comparison with the tutor. Still, she had won an honourable position among the great photococracy—that new power whose influence is daily increasing with the multiplying of the illustrated papers—and that was something.

She had remained natural, her father could not but admit with pleasure. She had never hesitated (he fancied) to tell him all that was in her heart; but until this day she had never so much as hinted to him that the love of a man was among her aspirations.

He had now and again felt that she was about to make such a confession to him, but it had never come from her lips. He had waited for it in vain until she had returned from the concluding lecture of the course with her friend Miss Talbot; then, in spite of his waiting—in spite of his historical research, he had been actually startled; and now he was standing in front of a window of the cottage looking out upon the dimness of the trees, as he asked himself if it was possible that she was keeping something back from him. Had she not seen some man—a handsome man—the historian of the Second Century fancied that the man must be handsome—who had been talking to her on other subjects than the increase of the temperature of fluids in motion?

He had never before heard of a girl being in love with love. He thought it was something phenomenal. He could no more conceive of a girl's love without *The Man* than he could conceive of a circle without a centre.

And yet he believed his daughter. She had almost succeeded in making herself intelligible to him. He could almost understand what was in her heart. He had himself felt greatly inclined (occasionally) to put a lighted match to his library—his manuscripts—his notes—and send the lot off in a blaze, while he himself set about the business of living in earnest. He did not doubt that every man worthy of the name, from Dr. Faustus down to the period of pantaloons and the Endowment of Research, had at one time been tempted by that fascinating fiend to give his books to the flames (immediately) and his soul (at some future date) in exchange for a year or two—as might be agreed—of life.

He had, of course, resisted such a temptation when it had

come to him. He had cried "Retro me, Sathana!" and had gone on with his work. He did not know that he would always resist: all he knew was that the fiend had gone behind him, but he felt that he had never actually disappeared. He was always hanging about the house—ready to turn up at the touch of a bell. It was his impression that most people who give themselves up to the writing of books have a handy domestic devil in their service. And it was actually with a sigh that he sometimes thought how his own faithful fiend was growing a trifle rheumatic. Yes, he could not but own regretfully that this old retainer of his was not nearly so sprightly as he had once been. He had heard of men growing gray in the service of the devil; a far more pathetic thought was that of the devil growing gray in the service of a man. Of course the reflection that he had never placed himself in the power of the fiend was a stimulating one; but this fact did not prevent his feeling a sort of pity for the decrepitude of his venerable enemy. He felt, he said, actually sad to hear the uncertain shuffling of the slippered feet where the prance of the cloven hoof had once been heard. There was no merit in getting the better of the rheumatic, asthmatic, wheezing old thing that had once been an adroit foe.

Breaking free from the net-work of this parable of a venerable and rapidly aging fiend, with which he qualified his position, Mr. Cosway felt daily a lesser desire to fling away his books and take the enjoyments of the world as other men—some other men—did.

But he had the most intense sympathy with that daughter of his who was now descending the shallow stairs from the room which she called her study, staggering under the weight of the books which she was carrying. He did not stir from where he was standing at the window overlooking the dim garden. He felt that the girl was taking part in a rite which had its bearing upon herself alone. It was not for him to put out his hand to help her, or to interfere with her act.

He watched her crossing the garden grounds until she came to where the autumn leaves were usually burned by the gardener. Here she flung down all the books that she was carrying. They fell in a rather confused heap—he could see the white of the paper gleaming through the dusk as some opened themselves in falling—and the girl looked

down upon them and clapped her hands to free them from dust. She moved with her foot one of the books that had fallen out of the line of the general heap. Then she turned and walked slowly back to the house.

Her father smiled: was she shirking the business that she had set herself to accomplish? Had she become tender-hearted in regard to the books? Was she going to spare them?

He did not stir from his place, and he saw her white figure once again in the garden. She was carrying a paraffin-oil can of the size that holds a pint. He smiled more grimly than ever as he perceived that her scientific education had not been thrown away upon her. He knew that she meant to saturate the pile with the inflammable oil—she could doubtless give its chemical symbols—so that nothing should be left to chance in the matter.

He was right. She poured the contents of the oil-can over the pile of books, and then applied a match to some of the loose leaves. In a moment the whole pile was in flames. It made an enormous flare over the dark garden. As she stood beyond it, her father saw how the light flashed over her face and the front of her white frock. Her appearance thus suggested to him for a moment a martyr-maiden with the fagots waist-high around her—only for a moment, however; then he perceived the irony of the suggestion: she was a maiden making renunciation of her martyrdom.

But the same light that revealed the charm of her face showed him another face—the face of a man looking over the small side-gate—it was of iron—just behind her. He saw that the man was watching with great interest the Act of Renunciation. He seemed to be wondering what it meant. Lily did not see him. She had eyes only for the holocaust. The spring night was calm, but a sudden unaccountable breeze came and sent a horse-tail of smoke waving over her. She sprang to the opposite side, and at the same instant the face looking over the gate disappeared.

Mr. Cosway opened the French window at which he was standing. His daughter turned her head in his direction, crying,—

“Do come out and watch how kindly they take to the fire.”

He was about to go beside her, when he saw a tall youth *rush open the front wooden gate* and, after pausing for a

moment as if in doubt, make his way across the smooth grass in the direction of the fire. Then he heard Lily say,—

"They burn so well with the kindly help of a little oil, one might easily fancy that they were made only to be burnt. I didn't carry down the text-books, you must know—they looked too respectable. Wasn't there a book in which a Scotchman tried to explain to some scoundrels that they couldn't hang him because he was a Baillie? Well, I think I felt something like that when I looked round at the books. 'Ye canna burn a Student's Hume—ye canna burn a Doctor William Smith—ye canna burn the Binomial Theorem and its Developments,' they seemed to say to me, so I merely brought down my own note-books. They didn't make any sentimental appeal to me, and there they are."

She pointed with a mock melodramatic flourish to the blazing mass. Her father remained at the open window. He found it very comical to listen to her addressing the strange youth, being under the impression that she was talking to her father. He perceived that she had been so interested in the fire she had failed to notice that the figure of whose presence near her she was dimly conscious was not her father, but a stranger.

"Of course as a symbol of the renunciation the burning of the note-books is as complete as if they were text-books," she continued. Still the youth was silent. He appeared, with the red light of the flames upon his face, to be blushing. She seemed to be surprised at his silence. "You're not angry, dear?" she said, and before the last word was quite spoken she had turned toward the stranger. Her lips were still parted. She was too shocked to make any movement. She stood gazing at him.

"Well, no; I can't say that I'm altogether shocked," said he. "They're books, aren't they? There's not much to shock a chap in that. As a matter of fact, I did a little in that way myself lately. That's why I'm here just now: they sent me down. Oh, yes, I'm a highly educated sort of Johnnie—sent down twice by the authorities. But what are you burning yours for, anyway?"

"I beg your pardon," said the girl, frigidly. "I thought for the moment that you were my father—that was why I spoke. I meant to speak to him. He is in the cottage. I suppose you have come to see him."

"Not I," said the youth. "He's one of the learned

Johnnies—was it Greece or Rome he annexed? No, I expect he'd take the part of the authorities that sent me down—yes, twice. I thought that a hayrick or something had caught fire—I came here to see if I could be of any help."

"It was very kind of you," said she, "but you see there's nothing of the sort here."

She gave a little inclination of that shapely head of hers, which people said was so artistically poised upon her shoulders. He took off his hat as she went a step toward the cottage.

"No, there's nothing of the sort—worse luck!" he remarked. "Only—I'd like very much to know what you mean by that." He pointed to the fire—it was not quite so brilliant as it had been.

"I think I must go into the cottage," said she, icily. She had never met a really impertinent man before. She felt that all she had ever heard about impertinent men was inadequate to describe them. She had heard a good deal on this subject from some of her college friends. They were constantly boasting to her of having encountered impertinent men, and she felt rather humiliated to be forced to confess that she was utterly without such experiences. She considered that she was now making up for their absence. "I think I must go into the cottage," she said.

"Why must you?" said he, inquiringly.

Her head assumed another poise. She stared at him.

"Why must you?" he said again. "It's not cold, and if it was, haven't you been thoughtful enough to make a fire? What did you do it for? Books, you know, are, as a rule, looked on as something too sacred to be burnt. That's all ta-ra-ra, of course. I know they burn well. Did you put a drop of oil on them? I fancied I could smell oil."

She gave a laugh. The moment that she did so she felt thoroughly ashamed of herself. It seemed that she was encouraging him in his impertinence, for he laughed too—pleasantly, but familiarly. She blushed inwardly—and that is the most fatal way, just as bleeding internally is the most fatal—as she felt that her laugh was precisely of the type which would be employed by a housemaid when addressed casually by a young man on her own level. She had confessed to her father some time before that she considered *herself* on one point very like a housemaid. Since she had

made that confession, it seemed that the resemblance had extended.

And yet she could no more have stifled that laugh than she could have strangled her blush.

That was the worst of it.

The severity of the glance that she cast at him immediately after and her assumption of a pose that suggested dignity was, she knew, incapable of neutralizing the effect of her laugh.

There he stood chuckling in her face. The chuckle seemed to be his easiest medium of expression. But it came to a very abrupt end in a moment.

"I'm afraid that I've offended you," he said. "Now that I come to think of it, it was a trifle cheeky of me to look over your gate. Isn't there a proverb or something that says something about a Johnnie not looking over a gate?"

"I don't know—there may be one, of course. You thought that there was a haystack on fire, you said. Oh, it doesn't matter."

"No, it doesn't, if you say it doesn't, but it was cheeky, all the same, and I should have been kicked. Only, you see, the idea of someone burning books seemed to me too glorious. It touched a chord—you understand?"

Again she laughed. He followed her, and she had the hateful thought that her father was listening to a laughing duet of extraordinary inanity—inanity bordering upon idiocy.

Then Mr. Cosway left the window and strolled across the little lawn toward the spot where this idiotic duet was being performed.

"Oh, Lord—the dad!" murmured the stranger.

CHAPTER VI.

ON INTRUSION.

WHEN the historian came near, the youth raised his hat with excessive politeness.

"I hope you'll pardon my—my—ch—intrusion, sir," he said, but scarcely with the glibness that marked his pleasant chat with the historian's daughter. It is one thing to chat

to an historian and quite another to chat to an historian's daughter. "Yes, I came across on—on—yes, a matter of business. How are your chimney-pots?"

"Speaking from the stand-point of aggregation," said Mr. Cosway, "I think that I may say that our chimney-pots are as high as usual. If any individual descent had been made from a group I fancy I should have heard of it."

"I'm certain of it," said the youth. "It would be so like servants to disturb a literary Johnn—gentleman at his work to let him know that a chimney-pot had gone wrong. And how about the drains? I feel certain that both chimney-pots and drains can't be right at the same time in any house on my property—it's unnatural. I never heard of such a thing. Wouldn't you like your drains scooped up? Most people like to have them scooped up in the spring. You've just to say the word, and I'll guarantee that by to-morrow evening this very lawn that we're standing on will be turned into a mud-bank."

"It's a tempting offer," said the historian, with the deepest seriousness. "What do you say, my dear?" He had turned to his daughter.

"I think it's getting chilly, papa," said she, and the tone in which she spoke certainly suggested that she spoke with good judgment. "I don't think that you should have come out without something on your head."

"Don't be deluded into fancying that the drains are all right," cried the youth, eagerly. "Don't allow yourself to be lulled into a false sense of security. I'm getting very anxious about all the drains. I read something in a newspaper about the awful danger of drains—typhoid, you know; yes, and diphtheria and measles. I'd never forgive myself if ever you got a single measles, to say nothing of——"

He looked toward Lily. He only saw the back of her head. She was giving him to understand in the plainest possible way that she was not interested in the conversation which he was pursuing.

"I'm afraid that you take too careless a view of drains, sir," continued the youth, with some degree of sadness in his voice. "That's just what the newspaper said: 'Most people take it for granted that the drains are all right. It would be much more to their credit if they took it for granted *that they are all wrong.*' That's what the paper said, or *words to that effect.*"

"I am overwhelmed by the kindly interest which you seem to take in the structural weaknesses of my humble home," said Mr. Cosway. "May I inquire how this interest originated? Perhaps I do you an injustice in assuming that its origin was not a purely philanthropic one."

"You would do me an injustice if you assumed that I was a philanthropic Johnnie," said the youth. "I'm not a philanthropist; on the contrary, I'm a landlord. Do you happen to know Tony Skilleter of Magdalen?"

"I have not that honour," said the historian.

"Oh, I thought you might. He's got a great name—extends even beyond Magdalen. I've heard a St. John's man talk of him. He makes up things that he supposes to be clever—some of them are, too; not quite so clever as he thinks they are, you know, but still smart enough for him. One of his sayings is that a philanthropist is a man who loves his fellow-men—for what he gets out of them. That's not so bad."

"No; I daresay it's not so bad as a person capable of perpetrating it might be led to say under strong provocation."

"Exactly. But all this is not to the point. About those drains, now."

While Mr. Cosway was considering with what exact sentence he should overwhelm this singularly free and easy young man, there came a shout from the gate—a shout as of a man expressing instantaneous triumph. The gate was pushed violently open, and a tall man with a very fierce, gray moustache strode across the lawn.

"I knew that I couldn't be mistaken in the voice," he cried, with a chuckle, laying a hand upon the youth's shoulder. "But what on earth brings you here?"

"What on earth brings you here, I'd like to know?" cried the youth, turning on him. "Do you fancy that I'm going to have an old fool like you running after me, like a nurse after a three-year-old baby?"

"Come now, come now, Willie," said the other, in that soothing tone which people adopt toward fractious children or animals.

"Come now yourself," cried the youth. "Who sent for you? I didn't. This is private property; you'll apologize for trespassing if you've any manners. There, you see, you've driven off the young lady. I don't wonder at it."

Lily had turned about and walked toward the cottage. Her father, however, remained.

The gentleman with the moustache raised his hat to Mr. Cosway, saying—

"I beg your pardon, sir. But I interpret very strictly my duties as a guardian. I'm this boy's guardian, and I hold myself responsible for his future. My name is Passmore, sir—Colonel Passmore, late of the Engineers. Come along now, my boy."

"I'll come along when I choose," said his boy. Then, turning to Mr. Cosway, he added, "I hope you'll not look on me as accountable for anything idiotic that this old man will do, sir. He's my guardian, but I can't always have my eye on him—you understand."

"You insolent young cub!" cried Colonel Passmore. "You infernal young——"

"Come now, don't you think you've made enough of a scene for one evening in a strange place?" said the youth. "If you don't, I do for one, and I think I may safely speak for Mr. Cosway as well. Good-night, Mr. Cosway. Don't let this little *contretemps* prevent you from considering that question of the drains. Anything in reason you may count upon my doing for you—from drains to chimney-pots, inclusive. I'm your landlord, you know."

"You mustn't take him seriously, sir," said Colonel Passmore, with a voice that had a smile in it. "It's true that he is the owner of the property, but by a clause in his father's will he doesn't attain his majority till he's twenty-five, and now he's only twenty-two. I'm his guardian. I have the honour to wish you good-night, sir."

"And not a word of apology," said the youth. "You're a pretty sort of guardian! Where's the politeness of the early Victorian period that we hear so much about, I'd like to know? Good-night, Mr. Cosway. I apologized for myself a while ago. Let me do so again, but on behalf of this ill-mannered old gentleman."

"Oh, this is past a joke," cried the Colonel, almost forcing the youth toward the gate.

The two went wrangling along the road in the hearing of Mr. Cosway, who remained for a few minutes upon the lawn, and then walked into his house, smiling grimly.

He found his daughter almost helpless with laughter on a sofa.

"A remarkable incident," said the father.

"An escaped lunatic and his keeper," said the daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

ON PREPARATION.

IN a room known as "The Study" in a mansion known as The Firs, about three miles on the Weighborough side of Ashdown, a dancing lesson was in course of progress. The blinds were drawn down, and the door was locked. The dancing-master was a German Jew, who called himself a French Huguenot for business purposes and to get his daughters properly married to Weighborough gentlemen of substance—not artists. Being an artist himself, Monsieur de Bressant knew better than to marry his daughters to artists.

He was counting the time for his two pupils while his musician drudge—also an artist—was hammering away with mechanical precision on the piano—the sort of piano that is usually hustled into the study in any house when it has got too bad even for the school-room. The study is the infirmary for the household piano.

The pupils were two, male and female, and of the two the male was the warmer, being constitutionally awkward.

"One, two—no, sir, you don't advance until the second bar—after I count four. Now try again; one, two, three, four—now, one, two—not such strides, please; advance—three, four—retire—don't turn round—three, four—again—very good; one, two—chassez—oh, no, no; you don't leave your partner to look after herself, sir. Only two steps—so—notice my feet—they slide; do not jump, or even hop. You understand? Once again. Music please, but slower. Now, one, two—oh, no; you don't advance until the second bar."

"He's very slow at picking anything up, Mussoo," said the female pupil, apologetically, but kindly, to the master.

"Oh, no, no," said the master. "He is only a little rusty; he'll manage it all right in time; we must give him time. I've had a worse case in my hands before now. You know Alderman Russell—oh, he was terrible, and yet when his *Royal Highness* attended the ball, the Mayor—Mr. Russell

was Mayor that year, you remember—went through the quadrille with the greatest precision—only mixing up the figures a little—doing nothing absolutely discreditable. Oh, yes, we must have time. Now, sir, one, two—no, no; you don't advance until the second bar."

"Oh, Lord! This must be the last round, Mussoo," said the male pupil, wiping his forehead with his sleeve—his shirt-sleeve, for he had long before taken off his coat and thrown it over the back of a chair. "I can't stand much more of this. I'd rather throw up the sponge at once."

"My dear," said the other pupil, whose hand he held as he assumed the attitude of a sprinter toeing the line in order to make a good start off. "My dear, what Mr. Russell did three years ago you can surely do now. You're not within ten years of his age."

"No, but for every year that I'm under him I weigh a couple of pounds over him," said the other pupil.

"One, two—hold him back—three, four—now," resumed the master.

"Ding—ding, ding—a—ding—ding," thumped the musician, and the first figure of the quadrille was resumed, several ingenious variations upon the original mistakes being introduced.

So it went on for another half-hour—it might have gone on for a full hour only that the sound of a carriage was heard upon the drive, and the female pupil ventured to draw back one of the blinds to the extent of an inch, enabling her to identify the vehicle. She started back, saying in a fearful whisper—

"Miss Talbot coming to call! Great heavens! See the condition that I'm in!"

"You're not nearly so 'ot as me," said the male pupil.

She cast a glance that was not wholly one of kindness at him, as she slipped from the room and waited, flattening herself against the wall outside—so far as was possible—to hear if her visitors merely meant to leave cards.

She heard Miss Talbot inquire for her and then enter the house. So soon as the drawing-room door was closed again, she breathed more freely, and unflattened herself, so to speak.

"Miss Talbot and Miss Cosway, ma'am," said the maid-servant—there were no men-servants at The Firs.

The dancing-master's pupil went upstairs with some alac-

rity, and her visitors heard in the room overhead the opening of many drawers, the closing of many wardrobe doors. They looked at each other and smiled frequently during the quarter of an hour that elapsed before the lady whom they had called to see entered the room from the French window leading from the garden, carrying some flowers quite negligently, and not looking extremely hot by any means.

She was quite surprised, of course, to see her visitors. Had they been waiting long, she inquired. How stupid servants were, were they not? And gardeners—well, she had herself been doing a little gardening. (She had apparently been gardening in a rose pink brocaded silk tea-gown.)

The lady's name was Mrs. Fowler and the gentleman whom she had been assisting at the dancing lesson was Mr. Fletcher Fowler. He was Mayor of Weighborough, and she was his wife. She had just sent out invitations for a municipal ball to celebrate the completion of the public baths. Not until the cards had been sent out was the Mayor given to understand that it would be absolutely necessary for him to open the ball by taking part in the dancing of a quadrille with the wife of the Lord Lieutenant of the County—whom he had incautiously invited—while the Lord Lieutenant would, of course, have the Mayoress by his side.

Now, as Mr. Fowler's early education had not included a course of dancing lessons, he thought it well to engage Monsieur de Bressant to make him acquainted with the rudiments of the quadrille. Mrs. Fowler was supposed to be acquainted with the rudiments of round as well as square dances, for in the days when she had been an assistant in the mantle department of one of the largest shops in Weighborough she had joined with some of the other young ladies in the same department in attending a dancing class. It was when Mr. Fowler had been an assistant in the glove department of the same shop that he had fallen in love with the lady who became his wife, though he had been wise enough—after the manner of the wisdom of the people of Weighborough—to refrain from asking her to marry him until he had opened a small shop of his own in the glove line, and had made some progress in his business. He had been thoughtful enough to acquaint all the customers whom he had served in the shop where he was an assistant of his

intention to open an establishment on his own account; and they had nearly all become his customers, he was a man of "such good address," they said.

After the lapse of twenty-two years he found himself, through the exercise of the same business faculty which had made his first venture successful, the chief partner in a row of shops, which, out of compliment to a modern prejudice, he called "Supply Stores." Here were sold a variety of goods, from gammons of bacon to gloves of Suède—from chiffons of tulle to grand pianos.

It was generally understood that when he was chosen Mayor of Weighborough he had attained to the limits of his ambition.

But some people shook their heads and said that they weren't quite so sure on this point. He might have ambitions even beyond the Mayoralty of Weighborough, though the brain reeled at the thought of anything beyond the Mayoralty of Weighborough.

And now Mrs. Fowler was asking Miss Talbot if she took two lumps of sugar in her tea or only one.

Miss Talbot replied to her, and then ventured to express a hope that the forthcoming dance would be a brilliant success, and her assurance that it could scarcely be otherwise.

Mrs. Fowler shook her head gravely.

"It's difficult to say whether or not it will be a success, Miss Talbot," said she, with a sigh. "I don't know but that it would be safer for us to go no further than a musical evening in the Free Library, with sandwiches and lemonade at the book-counters—that was what Mr. Hazlett did in his year."

"I'm sure that we have every reason to be glad at your taking a more liberal view of your duties, Mrs. Fowler," said Minna.

"I do hope that it will be a success," moaned Mrs. Fowler. "But people will talk—especially in Weighborough."

"Oh, they talk anywhere," said Lily.

"Nowhere so bad as at Weighborough," said Mrs. Fowler. "They actually say that my husband is giving the ball for the good of his own business."

"How absurd!" cried Minna.

"Of course, it's well known that no one in the trade can *touch us in ball-dresses*," said Mrs. Fowler, proudly. "The

dress-making department of our stores is said by good judges to be the most superior of any outside London. Perhaps you may say that I shouldn't be the one to say it."

"Why should you not say it, Mrs. Fowler?" asked Minna.

"People might say it was bad taste of me. But no one knows better than I do what good material and good fitting are in dresses, whether ball-dresses or tea-gowns. As for mantles—but, people will talk." Mrs. Fowler shook her head sadly.

"Only absurd people," said Minna. "Oh, yes, we are all looking forward to your dance."

"We are indeed," cried Lily. "It was so good of you to ask us."

"They will talk," resumed the hostess. "But I can't complain. Didn't they say that Mr. Hazlett gave his company sandwiches because he was in the ham line himself? Just as if your father, Miss Cosway, would entertain people by reading to them out of his books."

There was a little pause before Lily said, without showing any great enthusiasm of acquiescence—

"Exactly—yes, just the same."

"But when his lordship attends, and her ladyship into the bargain, it really doesn't matter much what people say," resumed the Mayoress.

"That's the sensible view to take of the matter," said Minna. "Lord and Lady Graswick are coming, of course. Why should they not?"

"It's real nobility like them, not upstarts like what we have at Weighborough, that's most gracious."

"*Noblesse oblige*," said Lily.

The Mayoress stared at her, but kindly.

"Yes," she said, "what you say is quite true, I'm sure. You're so clever, Miss Cosway—you couldn't be anything but clever having such a clever papa. Should you say, now, that his lordship and her ladyship would be perfect at the quadrille?"

"I really couldn't give an opinion on the matter, Mrs. Fowler," replied Minna. "I'm sure they go to a great many dances in London, so that they have every chance of being perfect."

"Ah, I was afraid of it," said the Mayoress, sadly.

"They'll be perfect, and if we happen to make a mistake—say, that we advance and retire instead of the ladies' chain,

we'll be shamed forever in their eyes; and everyone in Weighborough will talk."

"I don't think that Lord and Lady Graswick will mind in the least," said Minna. "I never saw a square dance gone through without a mistake since I left school."

"I'm afraid that you only say that to try and relieve my mind, Miss Talbot. Maybe you don't know the people of Weighborough so well as I do. There's not a lady in business in the town who wouldn't be delighted if both of us—the Mayor and me—made fools of ourselves at this ball, though there's not one of them that wouldn't give the eyes out of her head to be the partner of the Lord Lieutenant of the County. A good deal of ground-rent goes to him from Weighborough; that's why his lordship's so affable—almost friendly, I might say. But we'll have all the best people there too—quite county people. Mr. Oswald Clifford has accepted."

"He is back at the Court, then?" said Minna.

"I haven't seen him for myself, but I hear that he's back, and without a wife into the bargain."

She looked meaningly, first at Minna, then at Lily, as she announced the gratifying news—she knew that it could not be otherwise than gratifying—of Mr. Clifford's return unaccompanied by a wife. Minna bore her meaningful gaze without finching, but Lily felt herself blushing to a far deeper tinge than that of Mrs. Fowler's tea-gown—even her little toes tingled with the blush.

Mrs. Fowler smiled—then laughed.

There was a pause of considerable duration before she resumed her account of her probable guests.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Clifford is a good catch." The two girls shuddered. "There are some Weighborough girls that'll not let him go if they can keep him. I know the Weighborough girls. The oldest of them hasn't given up all hope yet. But there's another gentleman that'll soon be in the market, too—unless some clever young thing whips him up before he even gets the length of Weighborough. Willie Passmore—you know him, I daresay."

Minna shook her head.

"He's the son of Mr. Passmore who made his money in the Passmore Packets long ago, and then floated the business, making about a quarter of a million by the transaction. He bought a large amount of property in the neigh-

bourhood of Ashdown, and built himself that house—it's not a particularly good one—the Mooring, he called it. He only lived in it for a year. He died in the States ten months ago."

"I heard something of that," said Minna, rising. "Oh, yes, your ball is certain to be a great success, Mrs. Fowler. I wouldn't worry about that quadrille if I were you. It's sure to go right."

"I do hope so; but I'm afraid—mortally afraid. Must you go so soon? Well, it doesn't do to keep the horses waiting in spring weather."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON CONFLAGRATION.

NOT a word did the two girls exchange until they were some distance on their return drive on the Ashdown Road. Lily was the first to speak.

"Oh, Minna, Minna, was there ever anything so dreadful?" she said.

"There are many things—persons—ladies, much more dreadful than Mrs. Fowler, in Weighborough," said Minna. "You'll get accustomed to the worst of them, my dear."

"Oh, no, no; never, never. I've often heard of the appalling women of Weighborough, but I had no idea that any one of them was so bad as that."

"And yet she's not at all bad. I'm sure she's a good wife and mother, and an excellent Mayoress."

"But of what value are her merits so long as she is so deadly dull? Would it be blasphemous to say, 'What shall it profit a woman if she gain the whole world so long as she remains uninteresting?'"

"I think it would be shocking to say anything of the kind."

"Then I won't say it. But that woman——"

"She makes me shudder now and again, I admit. But she is not at all out of place at Weighborough. If we had waited a little longer she would have begun to talk about

her difficulties with servants. I know Weighborough well, and I never yet visited a Weighborough matron without being made acquainted with the great servant question."

"Why on earth do you visit them?"

"My guardian wishes me, my dear. He has large business interests in Weighborough, and it is necessary for him to keep on the best terms with all the leading citizens."

"And their wives?"

"And their wives. After all, it's not a grievous burden that is laid upon me."

"And the mankind? Are the husbands and brothers and sons all on the same level?"

"Oh, dear, no; there are degrees of dulness. The men don't talk about the servants: they talk about their business, and when a man talks about something that he understands he is interesting."

"And they understand business. Why didn't you tell me something about the Weighborough people during the three months that I was at home—while we were driving into the town to those dreadful lectures?"

"A day's experience is worth a month's discourse on any social topic, such as the dreariness of Weighborough and its inhabitants."

"So it is. My dear Minna, I find that I'm on the threshold of the world at last. I've learnt more during the past hour about the world than I did during all my years at College. There's nothing worth talking about in books, Minna; that is, such hand-books of knowledge as we were forced to study. None of them contained a sentence that might be accepted as an explanation of the way women are thinking and talking, and even acting, in these days."

"No; I should say that your books were silent on such points—unless the theory of the increase of the temperature of liquids in motion is an allegory."

"An allegory? What can you mean? An allegory worked out by a set of formulæ?"

"I suppose even a listed Third Wrangler can scarcely work out an allegory to five places of decimals. But suppose that you accept the liquid in motion to come from the heart of a young woman living in the midst of the dreariness of such a town as Weighborough?"

"I see it—I see it. Can anyone be surprised if some girls—there must be many at Weighborough, and if at

Weighborough, why not at scores of other provincial towns?—cry out when they catch a glimpse—they must, you know, now and again—of the future that is mapped out for them?"

"Now you perceive the force of the allegory of the liquids in motion. The girls don't wish to submit to the benumbing effect of the stagnation of such a place as Weighborough. So they put themselves in motion—otherwise join in some 'movement'—to keep themselves alive—to convince themselves that they are alive and not stagnated to death."

"That is perfectly clear to me. We feel that we must be doing something. Who would be content to become in the future what Mrs. Fowler is to-day? Not I, not you."

"We decline to believe that we were meant only to become Mayoresses of Weighborough."

"So some of us do our best to take a good degree, and others try hospital nursing, the lyric stage, or journalism. Minna, I felt when I had been in that room five minutes, listening to that woman moaning over her trivialities, that I had, after all, made a great mistake in burning my books."

"Burning your books?"

"Yes; I performed the Act of Renunciation after dinner yesterday: I burnt my note-books as a sign that I had cast my old life behind me. I had not a misgiving until I found myself listening to that woman, and then I actually found myself longing to be once more in the society of a mathematical problem. One does not look forward to spending a lifetime *tête-à-tête* with a mathematical problem; but a mathematical problem is never vulgar, and rarely dull."

"You have burnt your boats—your books—there is no retreat possible for you now, my dear Lily. You are entering the world in which the problems are not defined with mathematical precision, but have a way of their own of twisting themselves about and shaking themselves free of every formula that may be devised for their solution."

"How awkward!"

"Very. Your trained mind recoils from the thought of equilateral triangles becoming disturbed—sending out an unexpected angularity where it was understood that none existed, and becoming quadrangular instead of triangular."

"I wonder do housemaids take much account of problems and their solution. I felt uncommonly like a housemaid

last night, I confess. I was following up the train of thought that we entered upon when we were driving back from the lecture. We had touched upon the topic of the Man—yes, from the standpoint of the housemaid who wears feathers and is firm on the subject of her Sunday out. ‘*Imperium et Libertas*’ she translates, ‘I’ll do your dusting, but I must have my Sunday out.’”

“And you say that you felt like her?”

“Exactly like her. I was terribly ashamed, because I felt that the housemaid whom I resembled wasn’t particularly good; she thought too much about her Sunday out, and not enough about the dusting.”

“That was not at all good.”

“I confessed it to papa. He was greatly interested—I could see that he was; but so would he have been if I had confessed to some crime. He looks on me as a sort of working model of a woman—merely a female. He wanted to know exactly how I felt. I told him—yes, something.”

“He didn’t seem disappointed that a Wrangler should feel like a housemaid—and that not even a first-class housemaid either?”

“Not he; he was only interested, not shocked. He says if people were only natural they would never do anything shocking.”

“And yet experts on morality say that to be natural is to be shocking. Now, what is the matter? Great heavens! the horses have been frightened at something: they are ready to bolt. We’ll have to sit still.”

The horses of the victoria were certainly behaving strangely, and the result was far from being agreeable to the two girls in the carriage. The one animal showed the strongest possible tendency to get as far away from the pole as it could, and the other was doing its best to break into a gallop. The coachman was holding an animated conversation with both, remonstrating with one and endeavouring to soothe the other.

“What’s the matter, Dawson?” Miss Talbot asked of the coachman.

The man pointed with his whip toward the grounds of a house opposite to the entrance gates of which the horses had become restive. A dense cloud of smoke was rolling through the laurels and across the road.

“Some place is on fire—I can see the flames from where *I am sitting*,” said Lily.

"It's a summer-house or something of that kind, Miss," said the footman, whose place on the box commanded a rather extensive view.

"Turn the horses, Dawson," said Minna; "they'll never pass the fire."

It was easier to give the instructions than to carry them out. The horses would not be controlled; but, fortunately, there was a want of unanimity in their action. While one was standing practically upright, the other was backing, until the pole threatened to snap. The critical moment came immediately afterwards, for the prancing horse, on being induced to bring his fore-feet to the ground, made renewed attempts to bolt. Feeling the rein, however, he reared once more, and, after some expressive gestures, got one leg over the pole, touching his companion, who, quivering with fright, promptly swung round, sending the back of the carriage into the hedge.

The footman was off the box in a moment, and at the head of the horse that had jammed itself. The man might as well have remained in his place; he could do nothing to arrest the disaster which was imminent.

"Hold his head up, you fool!" came a voice from the road, and in another moment a man had slipped up alongside the horse, and had given him a very light but startling touch with a cane under the jaw. The animal was stimulated to rear once more. He did so, and, freeing himself immediately, brought his fore-legs down in due course, his mouth within reach of the man, who in another moment had wheeled both horses round from the fire, and was engaged in soothing them with his hand on the shoulder of each in turn. The footman followed his example cautiously.

"He touched your foot, sir," said the coachman.

"Only a touch, my man," said the stranger.

Minna had caught a glimpse of him from one side of the carriage when he was wheeling the horses. He was a rather tall man, bronzed almost to the colour of Spanish mahogany. He had curious blue eyes and fair hair. If his face had been pale he would have been called interesting by girls; but as it suggested Othello, a good many women were certain to have from time to time interested themselves in him.

"The gentleman has hurt his foot, Miss," said the coachman, glancing round to the carriage and making a motion with the *whip-handle* toward the rim of his hat.

Minna was out of the carriage in a moment, and standing beside the man. He saw that the look of alarm on her face was on his behalf, and that it was not the result of the recent close approach to a serious accident. He raised his hat without a word.

"You have been hurt," she said. "I am so sorry."

"It's nothing," said he; "nothing but a bruise. I think the horses are all right now. Something is on fire in the grounds—a summer-house, it seems to me. I wouldn't try to force them past the smoke if I were the coachman."

"We can easily go home by the lower road," said she. "It's only half a mile longer. But you—are you sure that your hurt is not serious? Oh, it is, it is; the leather of your boot is actually cut. Why, there is the mark of the horse's shoe on it. Please let us drive you; it is surely the least that we can do."

"I couldn't think of bothering you," he said, with a laugh. "I can walk, you see."

"Get into the carriage," she cried, as he made an attempt to walk, but limped like a cripple in spite of his having, as she could see, pulled himself together for a moment. "Please get into the carriage, and—no, no; don't put it to the ground—lean on us."

"Yes, lean on us," said Lily, who had got out of the carriage also.

There they stood, one on each side of him, as though they were anxious to pose themselves after the manner of Sir Joshua Reynolds' Comedy and Tragedy with Garrick between them. He naturally fell into the attitude of the Garrick of the picture—showing how clever was Sir Joshua.

"I really couldn't dream of——"

"But you must," said Lily. "We should never forgive ourselves."

He gave another little laugh, and actually blushed all over his dark face as he put out a hand slowly to the nearest shoulder of each of the girls.

The carriage was so remote as to necessitate his taking three steps before he could conscientiously release his supporters. Then came the question of hoisting him into the carriage. The three paused to consider it at the iron step.

But at this point the footman perceived that his interference was necessary. He had lived in families where there were young ladies, so he had effaced himself while the tab-

leau of Comedy and Tragedy and Another was being suggested; but he rather fancied that the pictorial element should give place to the practical at this point. The gentleman could not swing himself into the carriage from the shoulders of the young ladies, highly though the young ladies—that was actually what was in the footman's mind at the moment—might relish the transaction.

He came behind the gentleman, and solved the problem by raising his legs and giving his body a determined push forward until he was resting on the seat with his back to the horses.

"Thank you," said the gentleman. "You did that very neatly."

The girls seated themselves opposite to him, and the footman awaited his instructions in that attitude of respectful inquiry which is worth twenty pounds a year to any footman who succeeds in acquiring it.

"Home by the lower road," said Miss Talbot.

The carriage was in motion before the stranger said—

"I hope it won't be greatly out of your way to drop me at the Court."

"We pass one entrance on our way home," said Minna. "I do hope that you have not been seriously injured. Do you think that any bone in the instep is broken?"

"It is quite unlikely," he replied. "In any case it can't be a matter of importance. I fancy that I've scarcely a bone in my body at present that hasn't been broken at least once. I really don't believe that the horse could have put his foot down on mine. He must only have touched me. I'll be all right in a day or two."

"We can quite easily call upon Dr. Sims and send him up to the Court, can't we, Minna?" said Lily.

"We must certainly do that," said Minna.

"A thousand thanks," said he; "but I think, you know, that I'd prefer being treated by my own man. He somehow has got to know my frame and the breaking strain of every limb and ligature. He has put me into splints times without number. One must be very far gone indeed before one calls in a surgeon."

"I wonder how that place came to be on fire," said Lily. "That was the origin and commencement of our grief."

The man looked at her and smiled.

"Yes," said he, "that was the origin of—our grief."

She felt that he meant to suggest that it was the origin of their meeting with him.

Then it flashed upon her that that was just what she had said, and she felt so mortified that she thought it better to give all her attention to the charms of the Spring landscape and to make no further remark.

At a word from Minna the coachman turned the carriage into the broad drive under the splendid elms of the Court, and for the first time in her life Minna Talbot saw the front of the Tudor mansion known as Ash Court, and looked with admiration upon its fantastic gables.

But as the carriage pulled up at the porch there looked down at her from the side of the low roof the grinning face of the monster of a gargoyle.

The ancient sculptor had seemed determined to make a master-piece of diablerie. The face of the creature combined in itself the horrible cunning of an idiot and the mocking leer of a mediæval fiend.

She gave a little shudder as it grinned with eyes askew into her face.

"Thank you so much," said Oswald Clifford, as he limped into the porch, with his man on one side and the footman on the other. "Thank you so much. I'll be all right in a day. I hope we shall meet again—we're sure to, I should say."

"Oh, yes," said Minna; "we're sure to."

And the demon of the gargoyle grinned in her face.

CHAPTER IX.

ON CONGRATULATION.

SIR GEORGE ANDERSON was a gentleman who might have been agreeable enough for an hour or two daily if he had never been Mayor of Weighborough. Unfortunately, however, he had been Mayor of Weighborough, and he never forgot this fact for a single moment. He was alluded to by some scurrilous fellows in the neighbourhood—for Weighborough was not so utterly dull as to be wholly without the ribald element—as perpetual ex-Mayor.

He was never known to unbend. He was never known to smile except when he alluded to an existing Mayor of Weighborough; and then he did so sadly. He meant people to understand that the Mayors who had followed him in office were a very poor sort—deserving, of course, of the good will of their fellow-citizens and so forth, but still no more comparable to the Mayor of his year than a parish priest is comparable to the Pope.

He was not utterly devoid of prejudices, but he was quite as disagreeable as if he were.

He was said to be the best business man in Weighborough.

It was on this account that wise people who entered into agreements with him invariably sent the bonds to be stamped at Somerset House.

That was business, they said. And they were right.

He recognised the fact that that was business, and he never attempted to repudiate any agreement that had been legally stamped.

He was greatly respected in Weighborough—it was said that he was worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

Minna could certainly not object to the way in which he discharged the duties of her guardian. She had been educated in Belgium, and when at school, had received an ample allowance of pocket-money. Before her return he had built the house in which they were living at Ashdown—a very fine house with spacious grounds that were rapidly becoming agreeable to walk through. He had planted thousands of trees, and the high authority who had acted as his landscape gardener assured him that all that was needed was time to make his mansion the centre of a fine park. And he spoke the truth: all that was needed was time—say, forty years.

When he insisted on making Minna a liberal allowance of pocket-money and she protested that the sum which he named was far above her needs, he had held up an inexorable hand—thin, and the fingers with a slight inward bend—that silenced her.

“On any ordinary matter I am quite willing to listen to you, Minna,” he said. “But on this point I cannot. I am discharging a grave trust—a sacred duty. This is a matter, like my religion, between my God and myself.”

Minna ceased to protest. She received her allowance, and

found that it was not at all too large for the scheme of expenditure that she adopted. She had no worries in regard to the domestic expenditure at the Tower. Sir George had a most competent housekeeper, who controlled everything from the garrets to the cellars.

Sir George liked Lily Cosway and encouraged Minna's fondness for her. But he could never get on with Lily's father. Perhaps this was because of the way the people from Boston and Chicago hung over the wooden gate at the cottage, planting their Kodaks in good positions on the road, and waiting patiently for the chance appearance of the great historian to take a snap shot at him to carry back for exhibition at their work-bees and Thanksgiving feasts, while devouring cookies, and candy and crackers and other American abominations.

He detested America, and whenever he expressed his abhorrence of the nation, people in Weighborough who knew him winked and said that they expected he had had a deal or two in Wall Street wild-cats.

He had asked the historian to dine with him now and again; but he never could get on with him. Mr. Cosway looked at him in a way that made him feel uneasy. He felt with Mr. Cosway's eyes upon him as if Mr. Cosway was looking right through him and reading his private ledger at the other side—not that he minded any one reading his private ledger; but still . . .

And so he could not bear the historian.

But when Lily expressed to her father one day her conviction that Sir George was a very clever man, her father smiled at first and then laughed; and this annoyed Lily, so that she declared that she liked Sir George—yes, very much.

Her father instantly became grave.

"They have now and again attracted women," he muttered; adding in a louder tone, "Tell me how you feel exactly, my dear. It may help to throw light on an obscure incident or two that I have in my mind. Wealth conveys the idea of security to women: they like the secure in man. The ivy and the oak—clinging—strangling. Do you feel stronger when he has spoken to you?"

Then Lily knew that she was being put in motion as the working model of a woman for her father's benefit, and she *resented this*.

"I only feel that I like Sir George because—well, because I like him. Good gracious, papa, can't I like an old man without being able to analyse my liking for him?"

"You can—you can," said her father; "but if you could let me know—never mind—I daresay you'll let me know some time again all that would be useful for me to know. Ah, yes, you're of great use to me. A student of history should always have a daughter."

But Lily continued liking Sir George, and Sir George was good enough to tolerate her liking for him; and it was in this spirit of toleration that he welcomed her to dinner and complimented her on her courage in remaining in the carriage under the trying circumstances with which he had just become acquainted.

Then he went out to the stables to examine the horses.

"It appears that it was Mr. Oswald Clifford who steadied the horses," said Sir George, when they had seated themselves at dinner.

"I thought that it must have been Mr. Clifford," said Minna. "We drove him to the Court, you know. He managed the affair very cleverly, but I fear that his foot is very badly hurt."

"I'm sorry for that," said Sir George. "However, I'll send a groom round the first thing in the morning to enquire for him," he added, and his tone conveyed the idea that what was in his mind was that the severity of the wound would be in no inconsiderable measure mitigated by his becoming aware of the fact that it had excited the interest of Sir George Anderson. "Of course you thanked him for all that he did?" he continued.

"I really don't think that we did thank him—did we, Lily?" said Minna.

"I certainly did not," replied Lily. "I don't think that somehow——"

"That was my idea, too," said Minna, quickly. "I fancy that he might have felt hurt."

"Great powers!" cried Sir George, laying down his knife and fork and looking at each of the girls in turn. "Great powers! Where were your manners?—felt hurt? What on earth can you mean? How could he have felt hurt at your expressing your obligations to him? He saved you from being killed, and yet you never said a word of *thanks*?"

"That was just it," said Minna. "How can one thank a man who saves one from being killed?"

"How? Minna, I am quite surprised—almost shocked, to hear you express so atrocious a view of a very simple duty. What would you thank any one for if not for saving your life?"

"I'm afraid that I cannot make you understand," said Minna. She now and again found that she could not make Sir George understand just what she felt.

"No, you will certainly never be able to make me understand that it's good manners to refrain from expressing your thanks to a gentleman who has just done you a great service."

Sir George said nothing more on the subject of Minna's absence of good manners, nor did Minna make any further attempt to justify her omission.

But when she and Lily were alone in the drawing-room, Lily said—

"Of course you were right, my dearest, in not trying to thank Mr. Clifford for what he did."

"Of course," said Minna. "But equally as a matter of course Sir George could not understand that a man would think you very foolish if you said, 'Thank you so much,' when he had run an imminent risk of being trampled to pieces in endeavouring to save you from being hurt."

"I felt that, Minna; it would have been absurd for us to have spoken a word of thanks; and he understood—I could see that he understood—Mr. Clifford, I mean."

"Oh, yes, I'm certain that he did."

"So am I. We gave him our shoulders—a shoulder each."

"And would that quicken his understanding, do you think?"

"Don't laugh, Minna. I'm sure you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes; you mean that—that—well, that we let him lean on our shoulders. I noticed, too, that he did not merely make a pretence of leaning on them. He is not an absurdly light weight."

"Do you know, Minna, that is just what occurred to me?" Lily's voice sunk to a confidential whisper. "I felt rather glad, I think, that I was so well dressed. Didn't you? He *might just as well* have come upon me when I was wearing

a print—a cheap print, and a common hat, among the lanes.”

“P’chut!” said Minna, with some scorn in her voice. “A man never knows how a girl is dressed. They sometimes rave about a girl in a print, although quite as pretty a girl has been present wearing a frock composed by Madame Lucy Jones of Sloane Street. Why, the cleverest of them takes an hour to enunciate incorrectly the elements in a woman’s costume that you or I could set down in full after a single glance.”

“Is it possible? Yes, I quite believe it to be possible; I heard two men talking together in a quadrangle last Commemoration, and one of them said, ‘What sort of a hat was that she wore anyway?’—they had evidently been discussing some girl and her dress. ‘Her hat was the allegretto movement in the perfect symphony of her costume,’ replied the other.”

“Perhaps he conveyed some idea to the first man,” said Minna. “But I think we could have managed to be more precise as regards details of costume, Lily.”

“I agree with you,” said Lily. “But don’t you think that it’s very disappointing—I won’t say humiliating for one to have one’s hat that perhaps one has taken weeks to think out, described in a few meaningless phrases?”

“We must only submit to it, my dear,” said Minna.

“After all, the system may answer now and again,” said Lily, sententially.

“The system?”

“Yes—the systematic disregard for the details of a costume, which, you say, is natural to men. It makes the poor ones feel that they have their chances as well as the rich.”

“Their chances? My dear Lily, this is very dreadful!”

“Isn’t it?—just like a housemaid. Oh, I’m afraid that I’m doomed to be no better than a housemaid since I’ve thrown over my—my——”

“Wisdom?”

“No, no; just the opposite; scholarship. Heavens, is there no middle course for a girl to steer? Must she either have the feelings of a student or of a housemaid—an indifferent housemaid?”

“I should say that a middle course would not be quite out of the question. We needn’t be so desperately in earnest as you seem to be, Lily. I suppose the constant system

of prize-winning, under which you have lived all your life, has left its mark upon you. You don't believe sufficiently in Fate."

"I believe only in working for a prize, and I believe in working for that prize with all my heart and soul. But if you talk of Fate, what about that business of ours this afternoon?"

"What business?"

"What business? Why, the fright of the horses and the appearance of the deliverer in a tweed suit and leggings above tanned boots. Fate? Minna, I've thought about nothing but Fate ever since I felt his hand on my shoulder."

"Lily!"

"And I must say that I like Fate when it's so very intelligible in its manifestations. I shouldn't care to place my trust in anything obscure, but—leggings—tanned boots—oh, could anything be clearer?"

"My dear Lily, you gave me a little shock last evening when we were driving home from the lecture. You are giving me another now. I entreat of you, my beloved, not to talk quite so wildly—so absurdly."

"Pardon me, my dearest Minna. You see, it's papa who encourages me to make a working model of myself for his observation. He is always urging upon me to tell him exactly what I feel. Nothing that I tell him seems to give him a shock—little or great. But oh, what a mistake he makes when he fancies—I know he does, so does Darwin, so does nearly every other man—that girls take pains in dressing themselves in order to be attractive in the eyes of men! It is only a woman who appreciates the dress of another woman. But all the same do you know, Minna, I'm rather glad that Fate suggested to me the wearing of that gray hat this afternoon—everyone says that I look best in gray. If I had worn my chip, I should never have forgiven myself."

Minna laughed and then became suddenly grave. She looked graver still a moment afterwards when a servant entered the room, bearing a card on a salver.

"The gentleman is below, Miss," said the servant.

Minna looked puzzled, then grave, and, after a pause, said—

"I don't quite understand. Did the gentleman ask for me?"

"He asked if he could see you for a moment, Miss—he told me to be sure and say that it was only for a moment."

"I suppose he had better come up," said she.

The servant left the room and Minna handed the card to Lily.

It bore the name "Willie Passmore," and above the name the words "to apologise" were scrawled in pencil.

"Oh!" said Lily.

The next moment there entered the room the youth who had been the spectator the previous evening of her Act of Renunciation.

CHAPTER X.

ON INTERROGATION.

"It was so good of you to see me at this absurd hour," said he. "It was like heaping coals of fire—well, no, the less that's said about a fire the better for me, I think—I mean, it was a kiss for a blow—well, not exactly that either; anyhow, it's too good of you to allow me to come up under the circumstances."

He was not what could be called a handsome youth. He was undeniably tall and slender—his evening clothes seemed to accentuate his height. He wore his fair hair cropped so closely as to suggest a recent emancipation from a period of enforced seclusion. Then his mouth was large, and the resemblance between his ears and delicate sea-shells was not striking. But there was a certain frankness in his eyes and a freshness in his face that prevented his seeming ugly or even plain.

Minna certainly did not think him at all ugly; she had seen him occasionally before, but never with his hat off.

"I could not but admit you, Mr. Passmore," she said, "when you put those words on your card. But I really think that you must be doing yourself an injustice."

"Oh, you say that because you don't understand," said he. Then he looked toward Lily, and his speech that promised at the outset to be fluent, was suddenly arrested. A sound came from his throat that might have been called a

shuckle ; it was followed by a sound that was not susceptible of being called anything except a guffaw. Suddenly he seemed to recollect himself. He straightened himself on his chair, and gave his collar a twist.

"I couldn't sleep until I had apologised—upon my word that's the exact truth. I couldn't eat any dinner except the merest mouthful. I feel starving with hunger at the present moment. I give you my word that I'm not exaggerating anything."

"Perhaps a cup of tea——" suggested Minna, making a motion as if to rise.

"Nothing of the sort—no—thank you very much all the same. No, I'm content to suffer. Why on earth that place should have caught fire I can't understand. They say it was the oil."

A light of intelligence came into Minna's face. She now knew that the fire which had frightened the horses in the evening had been due somehow to the ingenuity of the young man who was seated—somewhat uneasily—in front of her.

"I hope no great damage was done," she said. "Fires are such terrifying things."

"They are—especially to carriage horses with some blood in them," said he. "I assure you, Miss Talbot, that if I had had the least notion that your carriage would have been passing, I would cheerfully have given up every idea that I had of the Act of Renunciation."

Minna was startled at the phrase. She had heard it only a minute before the entrance of this Mr. Passmore.

She glanced at Lily. Lily was crimson.

"The Act——"

"The Act of Renunciation. The idea was not original. I heard it once before—yes, some weeks ago—perhaps years—and it struck me as being beautiful. It met my case exactly ; but I'm an ass—as usual—to be giving you my family history when I should be spending every moment of my time trying to make you believe how sorry I am for what occurred. You were nearly killed, I believe. If you had been killed, manslaughter would have been the verdict of the coroner's jury, and a little later on, of the other jury—the real one. I could not blame them ; I should have no defence."

"But you see we weren't killed, Mr. Passmore," said

Minna, "so that you need scarcely trouble yourself with the question of the juries—real or coroner's."

"No," said Lily, speaking for the first time. "No—unless Mr. Clifford dies."

"I don't care a—a scrap about Mr. Clifford or anybody else," said Mr. Passmore, "so long as you're not hurt—either of you. Who the—the—who on earth is this Mr. Clifford, anyway?"

"Mr. Clifford of the Court," said Minna.

"Let him die," said the youth defiantly. "How did he come to be mixed up in the business?"

"He came to be mixed up in the business, as you term it, through saving our lives," said Lily, her face alight with indignation.

"Saving your lives!" cried Mr. Passmore. "How did he save your lives?"

"He prevented the horses from bolting," replied Minna.

"Yes, and I'm afraid that he got badly hurt in doing so."

"Lucky chap!" said the visitor. "Do you believe in Fate, Miss Talbot?"

"I believe in a man's bravery, Mr. Passmore," said Minna, quietly; and Lily, in spite of the fact that her indignation had by no means subsided, gave a sudden laugh, causing the eyes of the visitor to be quickly turned upon her in surprise. He could not possibly know what Minna had said on the subject of Fate a few minutes before.

"Do you believe in Fate?" he asked Lily, pointedly.

She would not desert her friend.

"I believe in a man's bravery, too," she said.

"Oh, yes; we're all agreed there," said he. "But how about Fate?"

The girls looked at each other. Neither of them made a reply. They shared the feeling that it was in no way incumbent on them to make any reply to the interrogation of their visitor. Who was he that he should begin to put questions to them on the subject of the ethics that they professed?

"A chap I used to know at Oxford before they kicked me out, used to say that a woman's belief was equally divided between Fate and Faith: when the one went wrong she fell back on the other. What do you say to that? It sounds so well that I'd be apt to distrust it for myself. Things that are quite true aren't so easily put into an attractive shape.

But as for Fate—well, I've been thinking a lot about it lately—yes, since last night."

He looked at his left shoe—it was of patent leather, and neat enough. Then he glanced furtively at Lily, and in a moment afterwards examined his right shoe critically.

The girls still remained silent.

There was a pause of considerable duration before he got upon his feet, saying—

"I think I'd best clear off. I expect I've put my foot in it as usual. Have I apologised, Miss Talbot?"

"You have apologised for something, Mr. Passmore," said Miss Talbot; "but I can assure you that I've no idea what it was for; you didn't frighten the horses."

"Great apothecary! haven't I even made myself clear on that point?" he cried. "I suppose there never was such a duffer as I am—no, never, excepting uncle—he's the biggest. Good Lord, here he is!"

The door had been opened by a servant, and there entered the room the elderly military gentleman who had taken the youth off Mr. Cosway's lawn on the previous night. He was followed by Sir George Anderson.

"Ah, I thought I could not be mistaken, Sir George," cried Colonel Passmore, advancing and laying his hand upon his nephew's shoulder as if affecting his arrest.

His nephew made a little movement, however, and the hand slipped off the supporting ledge.

"This is Colonel Passmore, Minna," said Sir George. And then he went through the ceremony of formally introducing Colonel Passmore to his ward and Lily Cosway. That was the sort of thing he liked. He managed to patronize all persons concerned in the transaction.

"He's not altogether without a sort of proper feeling, this boy," said the Colonel, indicating with his elbow that he referred to his nephew. "No, by no means; so it occurred to me that he would make straight for this place after dinner. Has he apologised? 'The best you can do is to apologise,' I said to him, when one of the servants told me of your *contretemps*, Miss Talbot."

"It was scarcely a *contretemps*," said Minna. "I do hope that the fire was not a serious one—a summer-house, it appeared to me, looking from the carriage."

"A summer-house, indeed—that's very well for a beginning," said the uncle. "Yes, we must all make a start in

anything we attempt, whether incendiarism or manslaughter. That freak of this afternoon represents my nephew's initial effort."

"At incendiarism or——"

"Both, my dear young lady. It was an attempt at both incendiarism and manslaughter."

"I admit it," said the youth. "I deserve the worst that anyone—even an old ass like my uncle—can say or bray about me. I'm an awful duffer as a rule; but I think that I've been making a record of late."

Lily noticed the contrast between his present aspect of dejection and his defiant attitude of the previous evening. He was clearly penitent.

"You have," resumed the uncle. "Yes, you've beaten your usual record. He was sent down by the University authorities a week ago for an act of gross insubordination—setting things on fire in the quadrangle after a wine—and as if that had not been enough of a warning to him, he must needs endanger life and property by making a pile of his books—all his college books and papers and the University Calendar—and setting the whole on fire—yes, by the aid of a gallon of paraffin oil. His 'Act of Renunciation' he called it—or was it denunciation?"

"No," said Willie, in a broken-spirited sort of way, and without looking up. "Renunciation—the denunciation is coming now."

"Whether renunciation or denunciation the act was an idiotic one," said the Colonel, sternly; "and every one here will agree with me."

"I doubt it," answered Willie. "However, I waive that point. Go on. Bowl away."

"He hadn't even the sense to know how to carry out his vandalism—his Bedlamite vandalism, by Jingo," cried the Colonel, glancing around at his audience. "He poured the oil over the books at the side of the summer-house—cost his poor father over a hundred pounds, fittings included, Sir George—I saw the builder's estimate—yes, and he never saw that there was a stream of paraffin flowing uninterruptedly from the bonfire to the summer-house—all the practice that he had at Oxford at burning books seems to have gone for nothing with him—even that's wasted time—and now——"

"There's another use for oil, Colonel Passmore," said Minna.

"Another use——?"

"Yes; you've heard of its effect on troubled waters? Suppose that we try that alternative application, and say nothing more about the—the—Act of Renunciation? After all, not much harm came of the matter."

Colonel Passmore sat very erect on his chair and stared first at the young lady, then at his nephew, as if asking for an explanation of Miss Talbot's adoption of a course so astounding as to necessitate interrupting him. Sir George looked very gravely at Minna also. He felt that she had all but compromised herself.

"Thank you, Miss Talbot," said Willie, very coolly. "But I really can't say that I mind much whether my guardian throws the oil on the fire or the water, I don't know what sort of a joke my dad had in his eye when he appointed him to be one of my guardians—the other is an American lady who is on her way here at present. I don't know what she'll be like when she arrives; but she must be a better man than the Colonel, whatever she's like. Anyway, I'll have to do a bit of sprinting between the pair of them."

"He's an unlicked cub," cried the Colonel, in an explanatory way to all present. "He never had the manners of a gentleman—that was why we meant to make a lawyer of him. But now that plan is knocked on the head."

"There'll be more than the plan knocked on the head one of these days," remarked the youth, genially, as he rose. "I've let him go on a bit because I'm in the wrong. I give you my word, Miss Talbot, that if any one had been hurt to-day I'd leave the country by the early morning's boat—I would really."

"But some one was hurt—Mr. Clifford," said Lily so suddenly that every one turned and stared at her until she flushed.

A curious chuckle came from Willie Passmore.

"I won't leave the country on his account," he said, confidentially. "No; it seems to me that this Mr. Clifford has come very well out of the business. You must look on him as a sort of hero—a story-book hero—and he should be obliged to me in consequence. The chances that a chap has of distinguishing himself now-a-days are few enough. There are not enough mad bulls loafing about the roads in these days to go round the chaps that are on the lookout for them in the act of attacking lovely young women—that's where

your story-book hero comes to the front. What's become of all the mad bulls anyway? Yes, the runaway horses come next. It seems to me that they're going out too, in spite of the steam rollers. No, I'm not going to leave the country on account of Mr. Clifford."

Lily was indignant at the nonchalant way in which the youth referred to the undoubted heroism of Mr. Clifford. He was positively sneering at Mr. Clifford—this—what had his uncle called him?—an unlicked cub. She felt that her face was flushed with just scorn of him, as she looked straight at him and then turned away—the corners of her mouth were turned down as she looked at him. Surely he would clearly perceive that her heart was burning with scorn of him.

"The duties of a guardian," commenced Sir George, in his most ponderous style. "The duties of a guardian——"

"Are like the state of matrimony—in the prayer-book, not to be lightly entered into. I've read it all during a sermon," laughed the youth. "He'll go with you there, you may swear"—he gave a jerk of his elbow in the direction of his uncle. "Oh, yes; I never get a minute to myself. What a first-class detective he'd make!—one of the shadowing sort; he fairly shadows me. Isn't it enough to drive a chap into vice—if there was any about here, which there's not? He's a perpetual challenge, that uncle of mine—like the standing armies on the Continent—a menace, as the newspapers say. Never mind him. Miss Talbot, I came here to assure you that I'm as sorry as I can be that my idiocy was nearly bringing you to grief—you and—Miss Cosway, and to promise you that it will never occur again."

"I suppose you're not likely to burn your books a second time," said Minna, quite pleasantly, as she held out her hand to him; for he had risen and was facing her.

"Thank you," he said, as he held her hand for a moment longer than he need have done. "Thank you. When people want to be very hard on me they say that I have a good heart. Don't you go about accusing me of that, if you please."

"I won't," she said, smiling at him quite frankly.

"Thank you. Nor you?" he added, turning quickly round upon Lily, and almost startling her.

"I—I? I'll never breathe your name as long as I'm

alive. Will that satisfy you?" she cried. She was now quite indignant at the impudence of the youth—the impudence of his egotism in fancying that she would make him a topic of conversation.

"It more than satisfies me," said he, a trifle downcast. "I didn't ask you to go quite so far. But it doesn't matter; you're on the safe side in giving me that assurance—only when I'm being tried for the murder of my uncle you might be tempted to say that you met me—once. Oh, yes, I mean to kill my uncle one of these days—just to show him that if I wanted to get into mischief he's not the chap that could keep me out of it, for all his shadowing of me. Good-night. Good-night, Sir George. I believe you knew my poor old dad."

"Your father, my boy," said Sir George, "your father was——"

"Don't trouble yourself telling me, Sir George. I knew him very well—not so well as you, I daresay, but quite well enough for all practical purposes. Good-night."

He walked out of the room almost jauntily. But when his hand was on the handle of the door, he glanced round in the direction of Lily.

She was looking at him. Indignation was in her face—at least so far as it could be. Her face was not the most favourable medium for the expression of indignation.

He left the room with no smile on his face.

His face was admirably adapted for the expression of a smile.

Colonel Passmore was on his feet in an instant.

"That's a pretty fair example of what I have to put up with from that—that cub, sir," said he, in a loud whisper.

Sir George shook his head—sadly—gravely.

"A pretty fair example, I assure you," repeated the Colonel in a rather louder tone, turning towards the girls. "Oh, yes, it's no joke having the sole charge of that lad. But duty is duty. I'm not the man to flinch from the duty laid upon me by his father. I've been in Egypt. Good Lord, what have I ever done that his father should have entrusted me with that terrible burden? I haven't let him out of my sight, except for a few minutes now and again, since he was sent down. Good Lord! Is it laid on me to try and do what the whole University of Oxford failed to accomplish? Is it a judgment on me for having remained single all my

life? Nature has her revenges on a man, they say. Perhaps so. But what a revenge. Nature must be implacable."

"Didn't he say something about another guardian?" asked Sir George.

"A woman, Sir George—an American woman—some relation of his father's wife, I understand," replied the Colonel. "I don't expect that she'll be much help to me. Still, we might do watch and watch about. I might then be able to snatch time to write a letter or two. Just at present I can't write even a post-card. Good-night, Miss Talbot; I do hope that you won't think me to blame for that last escapade of my precious nephew."

"Oh, no, no, indeed," said Minna. "Too much has been made of that matter already; and as for your nephew—I—well, I like him."

"Great heavens!" cried the Colonel. "Great heavens!" he repeated in a lower key as he looked toward Sir George.

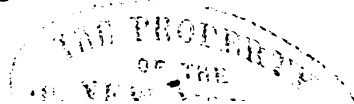
Sir George gave his head the least little shake in the world.

"Yes," said Minna, getting bolder. "I do like him. He is honest—straightforward—he doesn't think too much of himself."

"I give you my word, my dear young lady,—the word of an old officer who has seen the whole world and who knows men—that his most prominent characteristic is thinking about himself to the exclusion of everyone else. But, of course, if you believe otherwise, I should not be impolite enough to contradict you."

"Oh, don't mind contradicting me, I beg of you," said Minna. "The days have long since passed when it was thought impolite to contradict a woman—unless she happened to be your wife. I think that the new style is the better. At any rate, you have contradicted my view pretty distinctly, Colonel Passmore."

"Then I offer you a humble apology," said the Colonel, with a bow of the early sixties—a bow that somehow suggested crinoline and crochet—the Empress of the French and the hue known as magenta—the dwarf-like child-wife and the novel in which the characters were all fond of gravy, and got it plentifully—the masterly pun and the joke on the mother-in-law. "I offer you the humblest of apologies. I wonder will he go home now. I doubt it. You'll pardon



me if I follow him. I feel the weight of my responsibilities, I assure you."

"I respect you for your conscientiousness, sir," said Sir George. "Yes, in these days——"

"For three years—three years still is that responsibility laid upon me," continued the Colonel. "He is only twenty-two now—by his father's will, he doesn't come of age until he's twenty-five."

"Sir George can sympathize with you," said Minna. "Yes, amply. He has had the responsibility of protecting me since I was—I really don't know how young—the date is lost in the mists of antiquity."

"Oh, you—a very different thing," said the Colonel, with another bow. "I envy Sir George—I envy him, upon my soul. Allow me to wish you good-night. I know that I needn't offer you any apology for my intrusion. You can appreciate my motives."

"I'm sure we can," said Minna, as she shook hands with him. "But don't look after him too carefully. Didn't he say something just now about a challenge? Yes, don't offer him that menace, Colonel Passmore."

He smiled as the man of the early sixties smiled when offered advice by a woman. Then he bowed himself into the arms of the footman, who had been rung for to show him out.

"We are overwhelmed with adventures this evening," said Minna.

"I was rather surprised at you," said Sir George.

"In what respect?" she enquired.

"In respect of your attitude toward that obtrusive young Passmore. Don't you think that his uncle and guardian should know him much better than you?"

"Yes, he *should* know him, but I don't think that he does," said Minna. "At any rate, I like the boy."

"He was sent down twice from Oxford," said Lily, with the dignity of a third Wrangler.

"Yes; I like him," repeated Minna.

Sir George looked at her for a few moments. He seemed about to make some remark; but suddenly he turned and walked slowly from the room.

Lily quite expected that he would bang the door. She knew that she would have done so under the circumstances.

Sir George did not bang the door; on the contrary, he closed it behind him with almost supernatural gentleness.

She then knew that Minna must have a very trying time now and again. A man who could close the door with such gentleness when he was extremely angry must, she knew, be very trying occasionally.

"Thank God, my father bangs doors and swears frightfully at times!" she said, when she found herself alone in her own room in another half-hour.

Her father had had a very indifferent dinner and did not scruple to tell her so in the most direct fashion.

He had long ago made himself fully acquainted with the effect of an indifferent diet on a man who purports to treat of broad historical tableaux. He referred to the distorted language of Carlyle as due to the boiling over of the brose cauldron.

"Thank God, my father bangs doors!" said Lily.

CHAPTER XI.

ON LUCIDITY.

BUT Lily Cosway had a larger field for reflection than was bounded by an acquaintance with her father's temperament and its changes under the influence of great excitement, produced by, say, the browning of a portion of cooked lamb where it should be only the colour of newly-coined gold—a subtlety upon which he insisted with but a moderate measure of success. Yes, she recollected all that she had said to Minna while driving home from Weighborough the previous day. She had told her friend without any particular emotion that it was her intention to burn her books and to make an attempt to live the life of an ordinary girl—the girl who is content to marry a moderately wealthy man, and to be known for the rest of her existence merely as that man's wife.

But she had gone much further than this with Minna. She had not hesitated to name the man whose wife she said she meant to become. She had gone the same length with her own father, letting him know the exact *locale* of the garden-parties which she intended to give during the summer—did she mean the summer which was approaching, or merely

some summer in the future?—while wearing that brocaded silk frock of a texture so admirable and a shape so exquisite as to impress everyone who saw it. She had mentioned the name of the man whom she had selected out of the millions on the earth's surface to pay for the furs which she meant to wear in the winter.

And lo, this man had come to her!

He had been on the road some distance ahead of her, and he had actually run to her at last.

She had heard of people of whom it had been said that they had rushed upon their fate. But that Mr. Oswald Clifford had done so not merely figuratively, but literally as well. He had run to her at last.

What had Minna said about Fate?

Minna had told her that she had not a sufficient belief in the success of the operations of such a power; and, later on, that youth, whose most prominent characteristics were the chuckle and the guffaw, had said something about Fate—yes, he had asked her if she believed. . .

But what that youth said didn't matter—that nonsense (it was not even his own nonsense, but some other youth's) about a woman being equally swayed between Fate and Faith, did not enter into the question at all. The youth was a *quantité négligéable* in the scheme of life which she was planning out for herself. But he had his uses. She had become fully acquainted with the theory of the turning over of the earth's surface by that agency of worms. This theory proved the value of the worm in the scheme of terrestrial life.

She was willing to tolerate the youth who was easily recognisable even in the dark by his chuckle and his guffaw. Yes, but he must keep below the surface.

And thinking of these conditions which she imposed upon him—of his assignment to a place in the class of earth-worms—she could not help thinking how he had imitated her symbol of renunciation. He had been very clumsy about it. Even she, a girl, had not made a bungle of burning her books. She had set nothing on fire but the books, whereas he . . .

But it was unfair to criticise him. Who would be so foolish as to suggest that the earth-worm's wriggle was an ungraceful motion? It was that wriggle which caused it to fulfil the purpose of its existence.

It was the clumsiness of Willie Passmore that had compelled Oswald Clifford to rush up to her.

Ah, truly Fate worked in a marvellous way. Nothing was too humble to be an agent in effecting its purpose. And, after all, that chuckle was not so distinctly objectionable. Nor was the guffaw altogether unendurable. He was not what anyone would call handsome, though he was tall and straight and walked well, and he was slight and . . .

But why should she trouble herself thinking about him, when she had one very much better to engross her thoughts?

He—the other one—had put one hand—it was his right hand—on her shoulder—her left shoulder, and then she had felt—well, she could not exactly define what her feeling had been, feelings do not lend themselves to definition so easily as geometrical problems. But she knew that at the touch of his hand there had come to her a sensation such as she had never before known. If a definition had been insisted on—and she had hitherto lived in communities where nothing was allowed to pass undefined (for the sake of practice)—she would have said that her sensation was one of commencing to live. That touch of the man's hand somehow made her hear a voice crying, "Let there be Life!" and there was Life. Yes, she felt that she had begun to live. She had done well to renounce her old existence in which the attainment of scholarships was her highest aim. Scholarships! What scholarships could impart to her the feeling that she lived? That was a sensation far beyond the power of any scholarship to compass.

She lay back on her little sofa in her room overlooking the garden, before she began to make preparations for going to bed, and laughed in the face of the books that lined the walls—the books which she had not had the heart to burn, making her own note-books discharge the duty of symbolizing her renunciation of her old existence—she laughed as she recollected how she had for so many years wrestled with them for the wisdom—she had been told that it was wisdom—which they contained.

She had been a fool.

What was wisdom? What was it worth as a factor in life? Did its acquisition mean the increase of such a sensation as she had experienced when the man's hand was resting on her shoulder?

Certainly it did not. Indeed, so far as she could gather,

the consensus of the wisdom of the books was distinctly antagonistic to the increase of such sensations—that was, of course, assuming that her sensation was the special one referred to in the books, though it was quite likely that it was something altogether different from the one whose Greek name she knew and whose philology she could trace unto the third and fourth generations back, until she came within sight of the earliest progenitor of the name.

Wisdom?

There was no wisdom in the books. People had lied to her. Wisdom meant the joy of living, if it meant anything at all, and she had never known the real joy of living. She had wasted her time in the world hitherto. This was impressed upon the mind of the young woman whose name had appeared in the lists as equal to Third Wrangler; and she flung off her clothes in something like a passion of indignation against the people who had assured her that the attainment of knowledge was a worthy aim for a girl with the fair passions and bountiful pities that make up a woman's life—for a girl with such roseate whiteness as now and again gleamed in the tall mirror beside her.

She put out her candles, and as she threw herself into her bed she felt that she would gladly exchange all that she had learned—all her scholarships, not even excepting her brilliant working out of the subtle formulæ bearing upon the problem of the progressive increase of temperature of fluids in motion—she would gladly give all only to feel again for a few seconds the man's hand upon her shoulder—in her own hand—around her—clasping her.

Nothing more innocent had ever lain awake through half a soft spring night trying to work out the problem of a newly-discovered sensation.

And outside in the world the buds were bursting into new life in the woods, and at their feet the blue eyes of speedwells were looking up, awaiting the coming of light to show them the blue of the sky. The daffodils were breaking into life; the primroses were clustering together with the timidity of waiting maidenhood. While the girl slept the thrushes were making a stir among the leaves beneath her window, and at the first touch of light began to sing their mellow songs. Spring was making itself felt in all things of Nature, and yet the girl—the greatest of Nature's triumphs—had lain awake for half the night puzzling over the problem of

this new sensation of hers—asking herself what it meant—whither it meant to lead her.

And yet she had known enough the previous day to enable her to assure her friend Minna that all the woman that was in her was being educated out of her. Minna was clever enough to perceive that the very fact of her making such a remark was a sufficient proof that she was still woman enough in spite of her advanced education beyond the limits that usually make a girl contented with herself.

Minna did not laugh at her. She had heard the proverb about glass houses and throwing stones. Few persons now-a-days live in houses wholly composed of glass, but at the same time conservatories are becoming more popular every day. If everyone cannot afford to keep a conservatory, a forcing frame is within the reach of all. Minna did not laugh. She was very fond of her green-house. Now and again she felt perplexed with life and its problems—those problems which constitute so large a proportion of a girl's education now-a-days.

"I have burnt my books, and am now beginning my education," said Lily to her father the next morning. "I want twenty pounds for a frock." The historian was, as usual, doing his best to invent excuses to prevent him from settling down to his work, and he welcomed with great joyousness the distraction which a chat with his daughter promised to afford him.

"You are, as usual, quite lucid," said he. "The world is large—too large to hold only two persons, a man and a woman."

She looked at him with wide eyes.

"You are not lucid, O father," she said.

"Lucidity is, after all, an indefinite quality," said he. "Its definition is dependent upon the definer. But one can understand twenty pounds for a frock, and you shall have it."

"You have always understood me," she said. "That is because you love me."

She had taken one of his hands in both of hers and was pressing it very hard.

"Leaving fatherhood out of the question altogether, my dear," said he, "it is a rude mistake to assume that a man understands a woman because he loves her. Let that be the beginning of your education in the world."

She was thoughtful for a few moments, and then she said,—
“I will believe that to be the beginning of knowledge if you tell me that the end of knowledge is that to understand a woman is to love her.”

He shook his head.

“Alas! Alas!” he said. “To understand is fatal to love. Be content to love; do not strive to understand: be content to be loved; do not strive to be understood.”

“And this is wisdom?” said she.

“It is experience,” he replied.

She walked across the room and looked out to the place where she had set her books in a blaze. It seemed as if she was asking herself if it would be possible to recall the Act of Renunciation.

He watched her, greatly interested.

At last she returned to him.

“I will still be natural,” she said. “You told me years ago to be natural. I have never been otherwise. I mean to continue so.”

“Only thus will you get all the good possible to be derived from the world,” said he. “But you must never forget that the most prominent characteristic of the world is worldliness.”

“I am spending twenty pounds on a new frock,” said she.

CHAPTER XII.

ON PARQUET.

SHE was sitting by the side of Oswald Clifford among the azaleas of a corridor in the Town Hall of Weighborough, while the music of the string band that was performing for the dancers in the ball-room came fitfully and faintly to their ears. She was wearing the frock which had absorbed a considerable portion of the twenty pounds with which her father had presented her, and she had felt for the first hour after she had entered the hall and had observed the way in which the other maidens (and their mothers) had scrutinized her dress, that she had not spent the money in vain; even though she knew that what Minna had said was true in

regard to the uselessness of dressing for the eyes of men only. The badly concealed envy in the glances of the maidens—it broadened into positive anger in the glances of the mothers—as they became acquainted with the details of her dress and made a rough estimate as to its cost, made her feel that she had spent the money to great advantage.

Her friend Minna was right: all the woman had not been educated out of her.

And he had limped up to her and asked her for the pleasure of sitting out a dance with her.

They had sat out three, on one of the couches in the corridor that was beautified by azaleas.

The dance was the one for which the Mayor and Mayoress of Weighborough had issued invitations, to commemorate the completion of the new Public Baths; and it was a source of great satisfaction to his colleagues on the Town Council (they pretended) to find that the Mayor had stalked solemnly through the opening quadrille without making any egregious blunder. This was also a source of deep satisfaction (without any pretence) to the Mayor and Mayoress. For a few moments in one of the figures some of the on-lookers declared it was anybody's game—the Mayor was stalking forward counting his bars almost audibly and making no response to the conversation of his partner, Lady Graswick—"God knows that I had something else to think about than talking," he explained to his family in discussing the whole situation afterwards—and at the same instant Lord Graswick, who should also have advanced, but from the other side, was standing still. It was a supreme moment, and the observant members of the Council were greatly agitated (they pretended) lest an absolute break-down (not the dance of that name) should take place; but fortunately Lord Graswick retained his self-possession, and with a smiling apology to his partner, retired without confusion when the right moment came. The quadrille was saved, and the Corporation breathed again.

The Mayor wiped his brow with the sleeve of his coat.

For some years the Corporation of Weighborough had been petting the working-man. Every Corporation is bound to do so in these days. The brag and *blaque* of the half-dozen platform loafers who call themselves labour-leaders—and, indeed, they do lead the real labourer—yes, into ways of idleness—were permitted in Weighborough, as they were

everywhere else, to intimidate the respectable folk into paying for their luxuries. This legalised imposition had made its force felt in Weighborough, and respectable people were told that it was their privilege to provide the working-men with literature—they crowded the Free Public Library on the days when they were recovering from their weekly day of intoxication—that it was their duty to provide him with play-grounds, and parks and ponds, and they did so. They paid for bringing his brats into the world, and they educated those brats for him, and tried to teach them trades. They provided comfortable reformatories for them, where they did everything but reform, and still more comfortable gaols—finishing schools of crime. They provided training ships for them, which they set on fire, and food inspectors to see that the working-man got drunk only on the purest article. The Weighborough Corporation, in its zeal on behalf of the working-man, insisted on washing him as well, but this was just what the working-man could not stand; and he signified his displeasure by turning out the member of the Corporation who had been responsible for this measure—a busy-body, the working-man called him, qualifying the substantive with an alliterative adjective—and refusing to wash himself.

It was, however, generally understood that the opening of the baths formed a very good excuse for the giving of a dance by the Mayor and the Mayoress.

And thus it was that an opportunity was afforded Miss Cosway of dancing with several men and of sitting out three dances with Oswald Clifford.

She had not met him since that evening when—as she insisted—Fate had caused him to run toward her on the road that went past the Mooring—the house that Willie Passmore's father had built for himself. She had heard from Minna, however, that Sir George had sent frequent messages of enquiry to the Court, and it was generally understood that the effects of his mishap were far from being serious. There was no reason to believe that he would be absent from the Mayor's ball. Had it been otherwise, Lily confessed to herself—she was getting so very artful that she would not for worlds have confessed to Minna—she might have been content to have spent only ten pounds on her dress.

For some time after entering the hall she had her doubts

as to his appearing, and when at last she saw him moving about with the aid of a stick, she had some fearful moments when she thought of the possibility of his failing to recognise her—nay, of his failing to see her at all.

And even if he did see her, and recognise her, who was to say that he would think that the chance of their former meeting dispensed with the need for a formal presentation to her? That was a fearful point, and it had not ceased to oppress her when she heard his voice behind her.

How ridiculous it was for her to become roseate all over the moment that he had spoken! How could she have been so great a fool, she asked herself several times after. But the fact of a blush being quite ridiculous by no means diminishes the frequency or the breadth of a blush; and Lily's passed round behind her ears and overspread the exquisite curves below her throat.

"Do I need to be presented to you?" he asked. She had not found a word of answer, for that blush absorbed all her senses. (And this circumstance may perhaps be accepted as a suggestion of the danger there lies in making one's engagements with Fate too far ahead.) "I see that I flatter myself," he then said. "May I remind you that upon one occasion you degraded yourself by becoming my crutch."

"Don't fancy that I forgot for a moment; only—oh, how is your foot?" she said.

"It is hardly worth mentioning, except as one mentions a horrid thing that has passed," he replied.

"Still——"

"Still, I am going to ask you for the pleasure of sitting out a dance with you," he said.

She handed him her dance card. He wrote his name on it opposite the announcement of a quadrille—there were several square dances in the programme; they looked more official than the others, which were light and incorporate—and then saying "So many thanks," he allowed her to be led away by a youth who had been presented to her by the Mayoress, and who undoubtedly was a good dancer.

But Miss Cosway was unconscious of his skill, she was even unconscious of his encomium of the floor. She had given up herself to the thought that she would only have to dance with two more men before the privilege would be hers of sitting out a whole dance—she trusted that it would be unduly protracted—with the man whom she had seen once

before for a space of close upon five minutes. Clearly all imagination had not been educated out of her.

In due course the second of the two intervening dances came to an end, the youth who had gone through it with her renewed his encomiums of the floor, and by an exercise of the most delicate art on the part of Lily, he was led to a place that was by no means remote from where Mr. Oswald Clifford was sitting with some one who was apparently greatly interested in what he was saying. Some moments had passed before Lily perceived that this interested girl was Miss Hilliers, the only daughter of Lord and Lady Graswick.

She felt a sudden sinking at heart the moment she became aware of this fact; for she considered herself a very insignificant person indeed by the side of the daughter of the peer who was Lord Lieutenant of the County. She shrunk still further in her own estimation when she perceived—as she did without great difficulty—that the frock which Miss Hilliers wore was infinitely more wonderful than the one which she herself was wearing.

Then there were diamonds . . .

She felt sorry that she had come to the dance. She had been a fool from the very first. What nonsense was that which had passed between her and Minna—nonsense involving the mention of the name of Oswald Clifford? And then, in the presence of her father, she had not thought it shocking to mention the name of Oswald Clifford. What on earth could have come over her? How had she ever sunk to so low a depth of vulgarity? Was it any wonder that she had blushed when he had spoken those words behind her? She felt more inclined to spend an hour in tears than she had ever done during all her life. There he sat, looking in the face of the handsome girl beside him—a girl who could never under any circumstances, she perceived in a moment, be guilty of so shocking a thought as the one to which she had not hesitated to give expression to her friend Minna. She now perceived that Minna had meant to administer to her a gentle rebuke when she had made that reference to Fate. Minna had undoubtedly been shocked. How could she fail to be shocked, Lily asked herself, as she caught a glimpse every now and then of Miss Hilliers's placid face so close to the sunburnt face of Oswald Clifford.

And then the dress of Miss Hilliers—and her diamonds—just sufficient diamonds to be in good taste . . .

Once again the conversationalist by her side gave expression to an encomium of the floor.

"Oh, come away, please," cried Lily. "I do detest the strong lights of this balcony. Electric light is only tolerable when shaded away to nothing."

"The elderly ones object to it; they say it brings out the wrinkles," said he.

"That's it," said she. "I don't want my wrinkles brought out prematurely."

"Oh, you? I didn't mean to suggest, I assure you, that—"

"I think I should like to sit here," said Lily. She had reached a nook of azaleas in the corridor—she felt that there would be a chance for her to hide herself in that nook—yes, until it was time to go home and throw herself on her bed and there weep herself into an oblivion of everything—her own horrid suggestions, the brown face of Oswald Clifford, the placid high-bred face of Miss Hilliers, and above all—above all, the perfectly fitting dress of Miss Hilliers.

"By George!" said the youth in a whisper, "that's the very place for us. How was it that we didn't find it sooner?"

He had just followed her with that stealth which should give piquancy to the incident, when the first few notes of the band commencing the next dance floated to them from the ball-room below, and a low voice said beside her—

"This is our dance, is it not?"

She had not seen Oswald Clifford enter from the other side of the azaleas, and once again she was startled by the sound of his voice.

She looked at her card. She would take very good care that he should not suspect that she had been looking forward to her engagement to sit out the quadrille with him. In this artful way she scrutinized the names on her card, and then said—

"So it is."

Her eyes were very bright as she looked up, but her smile did not suggest a heart overflowing with merriment.

She could not but feel, however, that she had been very clever; and, indeed, Oswald Clifford was greatly puzzled at observing, which he could scarcely fail to do, that Miss Cosway apparently found it easier to read the names on her dance-card when it was turned upside down.

The youth who made his way back to the ball-room gave a circumstantial account to his intimates of the clever way

in which that pretty Cosway girl had planned no end of a lark with him, when that Clifford chap limped up and put in his kill-joy face, spoiling sport. Ah, yes, there was more fun in the Cosway girl than met the eye.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON CUPIDITY.

"You don't mind my saying that I have been greatly interested in you for some time, Miss Cosway," said Oswald Clifford.

"How could you possibly be interested in me?" she asked.

"Everyone interested in the history of the last quarter of the century must be interested in you," he replied.

"But why—why?" she cried. "What have I got to say to the century?"

"You are the girl of the last quarter of the century."

"One of ten or twelve million girls. The last quarter has had many girls. I can't expect to have a quarter of a century all to myself."

"But you are the most important of its phases."

"That sounds rather horrid, doesn't it, Mr. Clifford?—to call me not a girl but a phase. Would you like to be alluded to as a phase yourself?"

"I should account it a distinction. You must account it a distinction."

"I fear that would be impossible. I could as soon be called a problem as a phase. The moon has phases, has it not?"

"And so has the earth, and so has modern civilization."

"And I am one of those phases? Well, I'm glad that you didn't call me a problem. I wonder if the problem-girl is a phase of modern civilization, Mr. Clifford?"

"The free use of the microscope and the dissolving view brought about the idea of the problem-girl. Long ago people were quite content—and content means happiness—to look at everything with their natural eyes. They looked at God, the world, society, the soul, woman, naturally; but the

invention of the microscope changed all that. We screw on an extra eye-piece and a powerful object-glass and examine everything in heaven above and earth beneath with a power of a hundred diameters. It is the microscope that is accountable for the problem-God, the problem-woman."

"You think that there is nothing problematical about us?"

"There is a powerful note of femininity about woman, and so long as she retains that she will remain no more problematical than woman has always been."

"That is speaking by comparison—it is not speaking definitely."

"Anyone who would venture to speak definitely where a woman is concerned would be a fool, Miss Cosway. It is only the people who put their God between two pieces of glass and slide Him into their wretched microscopes that speak definitely. They have found out that God is two parts superstition and the remainder a nebula. They have examined faith and define it as the capacity to make oneself fancy that one believes something that is utterly preposterous. They have applied their most powerful object-glass to Woman and announce that she is a bundle of nerves in the midst of a nimbus."

Lily threw back her head and laughed the laugh of the school-girl—the unsuccessful school-girl. It was such persons as had given some attention to the poise of her head when laughing in that way, who had been heard to say that such a girl had no business winning scholarships—she was meant for something higher (meaning looking after the diet of one particular man).

"A bundle of nerves in the midst of a nimbus is undoubtedly a problem, Mr. Clifford," she cried. "But you are not a believer in the microscopic treatment of woman."

"Not I. It is a well-known fact in microscopic science that the stronger the object-glass the more limited is the field of observation."

"It is well known. There is a mathematical formula bearing upon it. I used to know it. I am hoping that I shall forget it with all the others in time."

"Great heavens! That is an aspiration."

"It is mine. But to return to the microscope."

"Oh, I only meant to say that those who wish to consider woman microscopically must be content to diminish their area of observation. Woman doesn't lend herself to that

form of treatment. The bone—or was it a tooth?—that someone discovered and brought to Professor Owen, leading him to construct the megatherium—or was it the ichthyosaurus?—was a problem, no doubt; now, on the same analogy, your modern microscopist finds something floating between him and the sunlight; he makes a grab at it and slips it into his microscope with great dexterity. He writes down all that he sees of it—its sensations, its twinges, which he calls emotions; its eccentricities, which he calls passions; its luminosity, which he calls soul. ‘What is it that I have described?’ he asks his audience. ‘A problem—a puzzle,’ they yell in answer. ‘Yes,’ he says, ‘it’s a woman.’ As a matter of fact all that he has had under his microscope is a single hair from a woman’s head—that’s all that his microscope would contain. Could Owen have evolved a woman out of a single hair from a woman’s head, do you think?”

“I doubt it,” said Lily, with another laugh. “Then you believe that woman is a phase and not a problem.”

“Oh dear, no. I only believe that the tendencies of a period may be reflected by a damsel or two. The polish of civilization gives her the capacity to reflect what is around her.”

“That is how you come to think me a phase?”

“Precisely. I have heard of your scholarship.”

“Scholarships, Mr. Clifford. Scholarships, I can assure you, by no means imply scholarship.”

“But a Wrangler——”

“Ah, that is, I suppose, where your ‘phase’ comes in—that is the reflection of the period.”

“Exactly. I wonder if you are the type of the girl who lends herself to be educated in accordance with the demands of the period.”

“I lent myself to the men who were anxious to show the world that they could teach girls as well as boys. Besides, I wanted to make the other girls angry.”

She was now talking as naturally to him as she had ever talked to her father. He had no difficulty in perceiving that she was talking naturally, and the perception was a very pleasing one.

“Your friend, Miss Talbot, was, I find, quite right,” said he. “She was good enough to sit out a dance with me just now, and she assured me that the period had not been able to *Wranglerize* the girl out of you—that you were still a *girl in spite of your education.*”

"She said so? Ah, yes, she knows that—she had evidence of it. Did she tell you that I had burnt my books?"

"No; she told me nothing about that. Did you burn your books?"

"I burnt them on the lawn in front of our cottage—they blazed beautifully. You see I had just attended a University Extension Course of lectures."

"I see—cause and effect. Book-burning seems to have attained the proportions of an epidemic in this neighbourhood. There was another 'call,' as Captain Simmond's reports puts it, on one evening about a fortnight ago. Did you hear of it?"

"Yes, I heard of it."

"Passmore, his name is—a very nice young chap, though not likely to be a Wrangler."

She did not speak.

"He said that his rite was symbolic," resumed Oswald Clifford. "Yes, he called it the Act of Renunciation. I wonder what you called your book-burning."

She was still silent.

"Young Passmore called upon me the day after the—the—shall I call it the accident?—there are happy accidents as well as melancholy. I fancied that an apology was on his mind when he told me that his act was the origin of my injury, but if that was on his mind, he went away with the burden still resting upon him. He dined with me a night or two after. I found him a capital fellow, only a trifle disrespectful in regard to that uncle of his."

"Curiously enough, Minna liked him too—Mr. Passmore; I mean," said Lily.

"Why 'curiously enough'?" said Oswald.

"Why? Oh, Minna has travelled—she has been in Italy—Vienna—Paris—she has even had a London season."

"And therefore you think it curious that she should like Willie Passmore?" he said.

"And is it not so?" said she. "That Mr. Passmore—is he anything more than an every-day undergraduate who has only won the distinction of being twice sent down? What is there to like about such a man? Oh, we have talked too much about him. Whatever he may be, he cannot by any possibility be regarded as a topic."

"He is not a highly-educated youth, I allow," said Oswald; "but I can assure you that he is very far removed from being

a fool. I would sooner be set down on a desert island with him than with most fellows whom I know."

"Oh, a desert island? I fancy that he might shine on a desert island; but elsewhere——"

"Ah, I don't fancy that he'll ever shine in the best society in Paris, Vienna, or Mayfair; but there are shining places in the world outside these centres."

"Chicago, for instance."

"Exactly; there are a good many people in Chicago—there's some hum—some buzz—about Chicago."

"And he hums and buzzes?"

"We were talking of shining. After all, what shines most in society is the seam of an old coat."

"I don't quite see——"

"You've heard of the seamy side of things, I'm certain. Didn't you suffer a full course of an Extension Lecturer on Shakespere?"

"The seamy side. I never wish to hear a quotation from 'Hamlet' so long as I live. But you wish to convince me that the men who shine are not the best men?"

"I mean to assure you that my experience is that it is quite possible for an exceedingly good fellow to exist without emitting a single ray. I've met many brilliant men in the world, and the brilliance of the majority of them was like the brilliance of a lighthouse: to act as a warning of the danger in their neighbourhood."

There was only a little pause before she said—

"Have you ever shot a tiger?"

"Apropos of brilliance—or is it of society?"

"Apropos of nothing but tiger-shooting," she cried. "I'm sick to the point of death of hearing about education, and problems, and society—I want to hear something about shooting tigers. Tell me something about shooting tigers, and about how they clawed the elephants and ate the shikaries."

He threw back his head and laughed—heartily, joyously. He could appreciate her longing to get upon some topic that did not necessitate a reference to a problem. That year there had been a sudden inundation of problems. London society was flooded with problems, so that the heads of the tallest people (intellectually) were submerged. Here and there a literary Noah contrived to patch up something that floated *above the problem-wave*; but the greater number of people *had not even a raft to keep themselves afloat*, and they were

engulfed in the problem-flood. A few clever ones, before the waters were assuaged, adopted the ancient device—has it not been preserved on the Assyrian monuments?—of supporting themselves on inflated skins. They inflated their skins, and did very well—yes, for a time.

When the problem-flood began to diminish in society in London, it spread over the provinces, and one great tidal-wave, it was said, rolled over to America. Then a man wrote a story through which blood flowed in Niagara-like volume, and in another month or so the problem-flood was swept away before the torrents of blood that came from the printing-presses. The town was painted crimson by the writers of romance, and people breathed again. They could all understand blood. It had at least the merit of intelligibility. Its specific gravity admitted of their swimming in it with ease. They did not need to buffet about in it, gasping for breath, as they had been forced to do when they had been inundated with problems.

But when Oswald Clifford lay back and laughed on hearing Lily Cosway demand the story of the slaying of a tiger, and, if possible—but this was not insisted on—the crunching of the bones of a shikarie, the crimson cataract had not begun to flow. The problems were surging up in every direction. There appeared on all hands what was called a Woman with a Past. The number of women with at least one past that cropped up was amazing. What was to be done with her? That was the question which people asked one another. They pretended that they cared. Then there came the revolt of the daughters. The daughters who revolted were—well, revolting. What was to be done with them? the elderly ladies (unmarried) enquired; and there was more shrieking in society. The husband who told his wife a story on the evening of their wedding-day afterwards elbowed himself into notice. Was his wife right in leaving him? he implored people to tell him; and there was a preliminary meeting at the Pious Sneer Club to discuss the advisability of starting a Penitentiary for unfortunate men—a sort of Home where they could remain in seclusion and do laundry-work. Laundry-work and repentance have ever gone hand in hand in England, and it was said with confidence—every problem-interpreter spoke with the confidence of an authorised prophet that year—that a course of clear-starching and gas-irons would soon bring men to their senses.

Those were a few of the problems that were being discussed by men, women, and the members of the Pious Sneer Club, who were a sex by themselves. They thought that they were arousing the great, strong, sympathetic heart of this England of ours.

That was just where they made a mistake.

It was the man who turned on the crimson Niagara that stirred the heart of England.

Perhaps it was because Oswald Clifford perceived in Lily's demand something of the change that was impending, he lay back among the azaleas and laughed.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I've shot a tiger or two."

"And they bit you, and—clawed and crunched?" said Lily.

"Well," he said, "I can tell you something in that way, too."

"Do—please," she cried.

And he did—through the next two dances, as they sat well back among the azalea blooms, and the enchanting melody of the dance (made in Germany) floated down the corridor from the ball-room below.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON MENDACITY.

THE third dance was over before Oswald Clifford's conscience began to reproach him. It is not until the fourth has come to an end that the conscience of the average man, sitting in sweet seclusion with a pretty girl, becomes a trifle uneasy.

(It only becomes uneasy because he is not sure whether or not the brother of the girl with whom he is sitting in sweet seclusion is an athlete. So many young men, the brothers of pretty sisters, go in for athletics now-a-days.)

"I wonder what the men whose names are on your dance-card will think of me," said Oswald, rising. "I don't think that my life would be worth an hour's purchase if they should find out that the lame Johnny—they'll all allude to me *as the lame Johnny*, you may be sure—kept you from them *by bragging of his tiger stories*. Miss Cosway, you told me

that you were just entering the world. I have lived in it for some time, and I can give you some advice that I believe would be invaluable to you for some time to come."

"Advice? Oh, please don't spoil my innocent enjoyment with advice," said she.

"I do so with reluctance," said he. "But my advice to you is never believe a tiger story that is told to you. You may believe an odd snake story—I have heard possibly three out of some hundreds that might have been true, but tiger stories . . ."

"But yours were true?"

"Oh, yes; mine were true; but having heard three true tiger stories within twenty minutes, you have exhausted the average allowed to you by nature in the ordinary course of events. Some people live to quite an old age without hearing three true tiger stories. But I—well, I have a conscience: I only kept you during three dances."

"I will have to tell the truth," said Lily.

"Great heavens! Have I forced you into this? I'll never forgive myself," said he.

Her laugh rang down the corridor and grated on the ears of the many Weighborough girls, who were sitting in solemn lines by the side of exemplary young business men. A laugh at a Corporation ball sounded strangely incongruous.

But the laugh of Lily Cosway reached the ear of a youth who did not seem to have much in common with the business young men except their solemnity. Willie Passmore had certainly been sitting with some solemnity on a chair half-way down the corridor when he heard the girl's laugh; that laugh rang out against the background of Weighborough seriousness, so to speak, as a flash of lightning appears on a night of blackness. But he did not feel the less solemn on hearing her laugh. He did not even rise from his seat until Lily Cosway had come opposite to him and suddenly stood still.

"I'm afraid that we must have missed a dance, you and I, Mr. Passmore," she said. "At least——"

"Now that you mention it, I do believe that we have, you and I," said he.

"I alone am to blame," said Oswald. "But I claim to be treated from the standpoint of the newly convalescent. You've heard, I'm sure, of the selfishness of the invalid, Passmore. That selfishness is intensified in a convalescent."

I would not allow Miss Cosway to escape the least of my tiger stories—the least probable, I mean.”

“I’m sorry—very sorry,” said Lily.

“Not you,” said Willie. “Why on earth should you be sorry?”

“Why didn’t you come in search of me?” she said, with a note of petulance.

“Blame me—me only, Passmore,” said Oswald, laying a hand on the other’s shoulder and turning smiling to Lily to thank her for having “humoured a cripple”—that was his phrase—when she might have been enjoying her dance. He made the word singular out of a desire to pay a subtle compliment to the youth beside her. She had, as a matter of fact, sat out three dances with him; but he referred to the possibilities of enjoyment being associated with one only.

Lily thought that he should not have gone away. He should have waited by her side until she had had the last word with the youth whom she had wronged.

“Yes, Mr. Passmore,” said she, “you should have come in search of me. Why, I haven’t been near my chaperon since the second dance. I haven’t had a chance; I’ve been invariably caught up on my way to her. You should have come to look me up.”

“I did,” said he, looking into her face, but with no reproach in his eyes.

“Oh. Then you should have been clever enough to find me,” she said, and the instant she had spoken she was sorry. She had been guilty of a pertness surpassing the pertness of the most objectionable type of the Weighborough girl.

“I was,” he said.

“You were what?”

“Clever enough to find you.”

“And you didn’t remind me that it was our dance?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because I saw that you and Clifford were getting on very well together—a good deal better than you and I would have got on if we had danced together.”

“Oh.”

“I said to myself, ‘Who the blazes am I—I was talking to myself, you know; there were no girls present to object to strong language, and I’ve no objection to it myself personally.’”

"Neither have I."

"I thought perhaps—never mind. I said, 'Who the blazes am I that I should propose to hustle her round the ball-room when she is enjoying herself down to the ground with a better man?'"

She stared at him. He wondered how it was that he had never noticed before what beautiful teeth she had. But of course they could not be otherwise than beautiful, when she had spent the time that other girls waste over toffee in qualifying for scholarships.

"Yes," he went on. "Yes, I saw you both among the azaleas. Do you fancy that I didn't feel that I owed Clifford a good turn for—for that foot of his?"

"A good turn?"

"Yes, a good turn. I felt that, and I sneaked away."

"Well?"

"Well? Well, I've done him that good turn—that's all. So now we start even."

"You start even. You start even. Look here, Mr. Passmore; I'm engaged to someone for the next dance, but I'll dance it with you and tell a lie to the man who comes to remind me."

"You will—you'll tell a lie? God bless you!"

She put her hand on his arm, and they went down to the ball-room together.

Whatever deficiencies in the matter education might be attributed to Willie Passmore, it would be impossible to say with any degree of truth that he was not a good dancer. He had had a good deal of promiscuous dancing during the two chequered years that he had spent at the University—indeed, it was quite well understood in certain well-informed circles at Oxford that the frequency and the rapidity of his practises of the art when he should have been otherwise engaged had precipitated his retirement from the University.

So soon as Lily had made a few turns of the room with him she became aware of the extent of his self-sacrifice in declining to disturb her from her place by the side of Oswald Clifford. She also became aware of the extent of the enjoyment that she had missed while listening to the story of the shooting of a tiger—perhaps of three tigers. Willie Passmore's self-sacrifice had involved a certain sacrifice on her part as well—it was involuntary, though it was only now that she became conscious of it.

Thus it was that, in spite of the enjoyment of the perfect dance—in spite of her perception of the excellent spirit displayed by Willie Passmore, she felt a trifle impatient with him. What business had he to take it for granted that she preferred listening to a tiger story rather than dancing with him, was the way she put the matter to herself in order to justify a feeling of impatience for which she could not quite account.

The dance came to an end—they had not missed a single bar—and in due course the man to whom she had engaged herself for it in the early part of the evening came up to her, and she told him the first lie that suggested itself to her. It was not a carefully selected one. It was too diaphanous for human nature's daily food. It was carelessly worded, and a trifle ragged about the edges. Had she reflected for a moment she would never have offered it to a Weighborough man whom a few years' experience of business in his native town had made a connoisseur in the art of mendacity. Even Willie Passmore, who, without having even been engaged in commerce, still knew something of the lie as an aid to retreat from an untenable position, felt that Lily's lie was unworthy of her imagination.

He was therefore not surprised when the Weighborough man hinted distantly at the difficulty he would find in accepting her story—it had something to do with the name of the Waltz that had been played and the resemblance of its leading phrases to a study by Raff which had been in her mind, confusing her so that she had inadvertently danced with Mr. Passmore.

But when the Weighborough man, who being the wronged one, should certainly not have irritated further the people who had wronged him, presumed to ask to see Miss Cosway's dance-card, Willie Passmore enquired if the wronged man ventured to suggest that Miss Cosway's explanation was not strictly accurate.

"Because if you go that length, I'll take it upon me to make you believe that and a good deal more," he added, familiarly.

The Weighborough man looked at him scornfully, and then gave a jerk to his arms that caused about an extra half-inch of his cuffs to appear over his gloves. He then turned round and walked away, not wholly without dignity.

"What would you have done?" Lily enquired of Mr. Passmore.

"What would I have done? Can you ask?" he said. "If he'd gone on the least bit further, I'd have smashed him—broken his head, you know?"

"Not here?" said she.

"Why not here? Who'd prevent me, I'd like to know?"

"Can you fight well?" asked Miss Cosway, B.A.

"A little," he replied. "Yes, I like it, you see, and when a chap likes anything, he's sure to take an interest in it and make some progress. I could double up two or three Johnnies like that. Did I do wrong in letting him off so easily?"

"No—no—I think not," she replied, doubtfully.

He gave a little start and looked at her.

"Great Apothecary! You want me to fight him, and by the living Jeremiah, I'll do it!" he cried. "Where's he gone?"

She laid her hand upon his arm—gently—restrainingly.

"Oh, no, no; don't think of such a thing," she said.

"Why not? You've only to say the word. By God! I'll do it: he doubted what you said. The infernal—you said you didn't mind an occasional strong language."

"I don't," she said. "What I mind is having all eyes turned upon me as the origin of a brawl in a ball-room. I don't mean to allow you to go."

"You've only to tell me to stay, and I'll throw over the pleasure of punching—but," he paused, his eyes were on her face, and what he saw there startled him—"by the Lord Henrietta, you'd like to see me fight him."

"Wouldn't I just," said Miss Cosway, listed equal to Third Wrangler.

"Then by——"

"No," she said, firmly. "No; you taught me a lesson of self-denial just now. I mean to profit by your example."

"When did I teach you a lesson of self-denial?"

"Perhaps your leaving me by the side of Mr. Clifford during your dance should really not be so construed."

"Oh, if you only knew! Talk of fights—but how was I an example to you of self-denial?"

"Can't you see? I won't allow you to fight him."

"Oh—I think—no, I don't—yes; by Jingo, I do see."

"I believed that you would—in time. There's another waltz. I wonder whom I'm engaged to for it?"

"Don't look at your card. Aren't you equal to another lie? Surely your imagination isn't exhausted?"

"I'm equal to a dozen, and as for my imagination——"

"I've every confidence in it; only—don't you think you should make your next a bit stronger? The last—well, wasn't it a trifle flimsy? Wasn't it rather gauzy—a book-muslin sort of lie? Couldn't you manage to put a bit of stiffening in the next?"

There was a considerable pause before Miss Cosway said, meditatively—

"I'll see what can be done. Oh, yes; I think I could easily stiffen my next. I'm heartily ashamed of my last. It was a poor thing."

"I thought it slightly unworthy of you," said he. "It occurred to me that you scarcely did yourself justice in it. But perhaps you haven't had much practice in that line."

"I'm ashamed to admit that I'm practically a beginner," she said.

"And yet you were at the University long enough to take your degree!" he cried. "How on earth did you manage to clear yourself when you were hauled up for something?"

"I never was hauled up," she replied; and his quick ear detected a note of regret in her voice.

"Oh; that accounts for the thinness of your first attempt," said he. "Never mind, Miss Cosway, we must all make a beginning. Don't be discouraged."

"I don't intend," said she. "I've done with scholarship, and I'm starting education. I've left the cloisters and am now in the world." They had begun to dance. "You'll see what my next lie will be like. But even if it's as bad as the last, and the man declines to believe it, you can still beat him."

"Unless he's outside this hall," said Willie.

She felt his fingers tighten over her own.

CHAPTER XV.

ON ECONOMICS.

"WELL," said Mr. Cosway to his daughter the next morning when she sat down to the table that bore the fragments of what had been his excellent breakfast. He spent an hour over his breakfast and newspaper, and then, as a rule, strolled about for another hour or so trying to persuade himself that something other than his legitimate work called for his immediate attention. It was usually close upon midnight when he began to deplore with bitter words and classical English phrases the wasted hours of the morning. He now welcomed the appearance of his daughter; he knew that he could depend on her keeping him from his work for at least an hour. But, then, was she not instructive as well as amusing? "Well, how do you find the world to-day, my dear?"

"I have not begun to think of it," said she. "It seems a little crowded, this world."

"You mistake. The world contains only two people—the one is a man, the other is a woman. I've said so before—yes, more than once," remarked the historian of the Second Century.

"I'm sure you're right," said she, beginning to eat her *omelette aux fines herbes*. "Yes, only there are too many reproductions of the woman for the good of civilization. That's why so many girls are compelled to spend their lives winning scholarships."

"Or not winning them."

"Or not winning them. The majority of them try to win a scholarship in order that they may have a better chance of winning a scholar."

"That's just where they make a mistake. Have you found that out since you entered the world, my child?"

"I've found out that there are too many women. That's why men treat them shamefully. It was the publication of the first census returns that annihilated chivalry."

"Heavens above! That that should never have occurred to me," cried Mr. Cosway. "Even if you have gained nothing beyond this, you have still made good use of your time in the world."

"I'm beginning to see things—yes, in a glass darkly. Is the glass darkly better than the microscope, I wonder? Mr. Clifford talked something about the microscope—woman under the microscope—last night. Oh, yes, my dear father, there were scores of the reproduction of the woman there last night. Some danced well, some badly, some not at all. If it had not been for the benevolence of the men—some men—only about a score of women would have had any dancing."

"Men are kind-hearted—they are also self-sacrificing," said the historian.

"They are," said she. "I met one of that type last night."

"Was he a fool?" The smile of the Philosopher of the Tub had overspread his face as he asked the question.

"He convinced me that he was self-sacrificing," she replied.

"Then he was no fool," said the father. "But to return to the woman and her numerical strength."

"I saw her there; the painted wall was her background. Sometimes she had shoulders—armed."

"I have seen her, but not nigh—blades, edged for the campaign."

"Poor thing! One or two dances were tossed to her."

"Crumbs from the master's table. Give her the tributary tears and pass on."

"I had made up my mind never to look at another problem in the face; but when I saw her—so many reproductions of her, I found the problem looking at me in the face. 'Is she superfluous? Is she superfluous?' was the question that kept buzzing around me like a gnat in summer. Is she superfluous, O my father? Has she always been superfluous?"

"I am trying to learn something from you—something that will repay me for the money I gave you. Do you really fancy that you can learn anything from me that would be worth something to you in the world? You should know me better."

"If she is superfluous, how has she become so? and if

she is aware of her superfluity, why is she idiot enough to try and make better terms for herself with the Man?"

"You have gone through a course of what is called political economy."

"That's just it. I was taught that the foundation of every system of trading is the law of supply and demand. When the market is overstocked with anything is the worst possible time to try and obtain better terms for its disposal to a customer."

"No principle could be sounder."

"Then what demon of malice is it that springs into the market-place where those rows of women are exposed—some tossed—some stale and unsavoury—and shrieks to them that now is the time for them to make the best terms with the men who are carefully avoiding them—to insist on his improving himself in every way before coming into their presence? It must be a malicious and satirical demon that comes with such mocking suggestions to a poor woman."

"It is—it is."

"By all the laws of political economy the present is just the moment when man has the right to insist that a woman shall be everything that he pleases, and to offer just as little as possible in return."

"And it appears to me that he recognises this fact most amply."

"That is where you are wrong, my dear papa."

"I daresay. I'm only stumbling along. I'm anxious to be guided by you. You've never yet led me astray."

"Women would be able to make no terms with men if it were not for their cleverness. The weaker animals have cleverness on their side. It is the cleverness on the part of a woman that persuades one particular man that he cannot live any longer in the world without her. Isn't the power of throwing such a glamour over him the supreme cleverness of created beings?"

"I have often thought so. Is it exercised unconsciously?"

"It is exercised as unconsciously as instinct. But there—I told you weeks ago that I was tired of problems. I have turned from the problem to the Man. I was with two men last night—both of them interested me greatly—almost delighted me, I may say."

"I hope that neither of them was a scholar."

"How could I possibly be interested in a scholar, papa?"

"How, indeed? A scholar is not a man; he is a man's head."

"I could never be interested in a man's head only."

"Neither of them was a poet, I hope. A poet is all head and wings—as unsatisfactory as a cherub."

"They were both men—men—men. One of them told me how he killed wild beasts—that was something to interest a girl—wild beasts that sprung upon him and carried off bits of his legs, and crunched the bones of his arms before he ripped them up with his knife and the blood spurted out on him, lukewarm, like restaurant soup—he said so. He was a man."

"It appears to me that man possesses a measure of cunning as well as woman. And the other—had he killed wild beasts too?"

"He had fought with men as with beasts at Oxford—yes, until he was sent down."

"And he was able to pronounce an opinion as to the temperature of blood?"

"He described a fight to me. He was in the wrong—badly in the wrong; but he was able to say what the other man's blood was like: milk fresh from the cow."

"Accurate enough for all practical purposes—say, an essay on the ratio of increase in temperature of fluids in motion."

"Don't breathe a word of that topic while I am near. Dearest father, can you tell me if there was ever a craze in Rome for insisting on women acquiring knowledge on higher mathematics—on all the subjects of a Newnham course?"

"Except modern languages and literature. Well, if there was?"

"If there was, the popularity of the arena becomes intelligible to me. The thumbs turned down represented the reaction from the books and the professors of all forms of knowledge under the sun except the knowledge of a woman's nature. I'm beginning to learn something of a woman's nature now."

"So am I."

"Hitherto I was kept in complete ignorance of it. It was a sealed book to me—every other book was open to me. Yes; Willie Passmore only wanted me to give him the sign to fight a man who declined to believe a lie that I told him."

"Heavens above! And you had difficulty restraining
him?"

"I had difficulty in restraining myself from giving him permission. I never saw a fight between a man and a beast, or between a man and a man. I should like to see a fight—once."

"If you are a good girl you may some day."

"If they haven't educated all the fighting out of men before then."

"Men will fight whether educated or natural. Long ago they used to fight only when there was a woman in the case. They don't fight for the possession of a woman now-a-days, but because they know that there's no man so attractive to a woman as a fighter. You shall have money for a new frock when you need one again—before you need one. I have learned much from you this morning; you haven't wasted your time."

"One more word—one more confession." Lily had risen from the table at the same moment that her father had done so. She stood with her eyes bent upon the serviette that she had just folded. "I saw a girl there with a far handsomer dress than mine. I felt that I should have liked to kill her."

"You shall have the handsomest dress next time, my dear," said her father. He had gone to her and put his arm about her, kissing her on the forehead.

"No, no," she whispered—her tone was that of the penitent. "No, no. I feel now how wrong it was of me to wish to kill her."

"It was natural. I have entreated you to be always natural," said he.

"It was savage—unchristian," said she, and there was the suspicion of a sob after she had said the last word. "Yes; I feel now how wrong I was: I should have tried to get the better of her—dress and all."

Her father looked at her, holding her at arm's length from him. Then he kissed her again.

"Lunch at two," he said.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON MEMORY.

SHE had the remainder of the day to think over her dance—if she needed to think over it. She had no duties of the house to occupy her. Her time was all her own. She had written to the library for novels, and two boxfuls, English and French and German, had arrived the day before. The day marked the attainment of more than Spring's supremacy. Sunshine filled the world. In the garden outside the open window, where she had seated herself, there were signs of Summer. All the girl in spring was warming into summer's woman. All the promise of loveliness, of ripeness, of completeness was being realized. The air, saturated with sunshine, was full of a deeper scent than that of the new-burst blossoms, the fresh sap of the opened leaves. A summer flower or two had come into life, and the smell of them gave a token of joy to the girl who had watched every sap-green shoot push itself up from the brown earth. And then the birds' songs—what a delight they were! Two larks were in the sky—the one was but faintly heard, the other was over a meadow close at hand, and every note that came from it was clear, sweet, and with no suggestion of shrillness about it. In the myrtle hedge there was the movement of wings; then came a note or two; then silence. She waited for the response of those notes—the soul of the Spring thrilled through them.

Was the response never going to come, the girl wondered.

She saw the gleam of the eye of the bird—she saw the yellow beak moving by jerks with every quick poise of the bird's head. There was a whirl of wings among the branches of a laurel, and then came the joyful answer.

Question and answer—question and answer—that is the music of a summer's day that surprises the spring by the suddenness of its coming. The one that loves calls aloud to *the one that is loving*, the loving one responds and the season *is satisfied*. Life, life, life! the strong soul of the season

calls for life—new life—fresh life. The soul of the season calls to the heart of the maiden and she responds, wondering all the while how it is that her cheeks are flushed.

As she sat among the scents of the garden, Lily Cosway's cheeks were flushed. Did she know why?

She had no longing that was not a longing of the Spring that had suddenly ripened into Summer. There was nothing so good as love, she knew. Nothing so good? Why, there was nothing else in the world. Love was everything. And yet for years she had laughed at it. It had been the object of her scorn. She remembered how she had ridiculed the girls who had looked pale, and become careful about the fuzzy hair that was trained over their foreheads. They were in love, they confessed to her, and she asked them what it was like. They tried to explain to her—some through the medium of lyrics that did not scan easily—some by calling her attention to the beauty of form and face of certain youths who had been seen loitering in the neighbourhood of the school—youths with pallid complexions, and, usually, large eyes; not unfrequently they wore velvet coats and patent-leather shoes. But she had pointed out to the versewriters that, however broad-minded and liberal in their ideas people were on the subject of verse, there was a consensus of opinion that an anapaestic line could not legitimately be used alternatively or indiscriminately with purely spondaic lines. And as for the pallid young men, she declared that they were unhealthy—she even went the length of specifying the precise sort of medicine that they required—it was administered in the form of a pill, and it was more popular as a remedy with the preceptresses of the school than with the young ladies; but that was probably because the young ladies knew more about it. They, and not the governesses, had to swallow it.

"They call it love," she had said with scorn, ridicule, and derision, and then she had settled herself down to the course of study prescribed for the candidates for the scholarship.

Love as a subject of discussion was extremely popular in the school—more so even than at the University; but she had never joined in any unofficial unacademic consideration of love; though, as has already been stated, she was perfectly grounded in its philological changes and developments. Love might not have existed, for all she cared about it. It seemed to her to be something that only ceased to be silly

when it was treated by a master in a broadly lyrical spirit; but, even then, no one who had not been let into the secret knew what the master was driving at.

But now—well, now she sat with the life of the one supreme day in the Spring beating in her heart-beats, flushing in her fair face, as she said—

“And I have wasted all these years—I have wasted all these years, when it was waiting for me, and I knew nothing of it. In another year I might have been educated out of the power to appreciate it. I might have gone down to the grave without it—without having once lived in the world. I know it now; it is life—life—life!”

And then, after having given some hours of feeling to the abstract principle of love, she began to think of the Man.

Was it possible to be only in love with love? Surely it was possible. Surely she was only in love with the idea of loving and being loved; and yet . . .

She began to think of two men—the two men about whom she had spoken to her father while eating her breakfast—the two men who had told her those happy little stories of bloodshed. She remembered that it was Mr. Oswald Clifford whose blood had been the warmer. It had also been the stronger: “milk fresh from the cow”—that was Willie Passmore’s simile, and she felt that it was feeble compared to the “lukewarm restaurant soup” referred to by Oswald Clifford. Clearly Oswald Clifford had the more imagination.

The more imagination! Great heavens! how was it possible that she came to do him the injustice of thinking of him and instinctively comparing him with such a raw boy as Willie Passmore? He was a man who had travelled in every part of the world and had lived his life among men. He had been in places where he had carried his life in his hand. She did not need his assurance of this fact; he had only to name the places, she knew what was their character. He had been in the jaws of death more than once—literally: he had told her the story. There had been no brag in it: it was a serious reflection upon his skill. His own stupidity and clumsiness had been accountable for his near approach to a complete disaster.

Then he was a man with intellect. She tried to make herself believe that she valued this incident in her reflections

upon Oswald Clifford—that she thought the more of him because he was acquainted with the topics of the day—because he had told her that he had been interested in her for a long time, as he considered her the product of a phase of the last quarter of the Century.

He was, moreover, a man whose face was a manly one, whose arms were strong. That was something to think about; and she did think about it—the strength—the manliness. Why, had he not said that every bone in his body had been broken at least once? That was a man to love.

(And thus it was that she was led on from being in love with love to be in love with manliness.)

Then it suddenly occurred to her that Oswald Clifford was the owner of a beautiful house surrounded by a park, and that it was understood that he would be the next Member of Parliament for his Division of the County. She did not give much thought to this; for immediately after the recollection came to her, there flashed across her the memory of the first moment that she had seen him the previous night. He had been by the side of that very pretty girl, the daughter of the Lord Lieutenant of the County—a pretty girl wearing a superb dress, and just sufficient diamonds of extraordinary lustre to suggest that if she wished she might wear twice as many. The steadfast tranquil face of Miss Hilliers had been close to his face, and while he had been telling her something that plainly interested her, she had looked straight into his eyes.

It was upon this incident that she thought most.

“I was right: I was a fool to think of there being any delight in killing her. Let her take her dress—it was a *moiré*, brocaded in a French design of flowers, with a delicate blue knot about their stems—let her take it and her diamonds as well. If I cannot get the better of her, dress and all, I may as well go back to my cloister.”

How interesting he made himself! was her next thought (she did not know that a man is interesting in the eyes of a woman in proportion to the amount of interest he manifests in her). Yes, he had made himself interesting from the first moment he had spoken to her, telling her—what was it that he had told her? Oh, yes, that he had been interested in her for a long time, thinking of her as a phase of the period.

Had he *seemed* interesting in Miss Hilliers's eyes, she

wondered. Had he been thinking of her for some time also? Was he thinking of her on this lovely day—this jewel day—this day of opals and emeralds and sapphires? Why was he not with her, sitting on the grass at her feet, listening with her to the songs of the larks in the sky, and of the blackbirds among the laurels? Why was some one not here with her—some one—even Willie Passmore; he would be better than no one. He was always in a good humour; and he was by no means the ungraceful lout that he had seemed on the evening when he had stood beside her on the lawn and watched her burning her books. How was it that Minna had judged him more accurately than she, Lily, had done? Minna had said from the first that she liked him—that he was frank and honest. And yet Minna had not danced with him, nor had she heard his fascinating stories of bloodshed. How had she been able to estimate his character so rapidly, and upon such a slender basis of incident?

Alas! Minna had been in the world of living men and women, while she, Lily, had been in the world of dead things—dead languages, inanimate mathematics. Minna would not have been startled as she was on hearing from him that he had wilfully allowed her to sit among the azaleas during the dance for which she had engaged herself to him. The explanation that he owed Oswald Clifford a good turn would not have come upon Minna's ears in the light of a revelation. She would have known that such a way of looking at the matter was perfectly consistent with the character of the youth.

And then his dancing—her cheeks flushed to a still deeper tinge as she thought of the three dances—all of them illicit, therefore more rapturous—which she had had with Willie Passmore. They were memorable. Would she ever forget them? Why was he not here to dance with her across the lawn? Would he ever come back? Would she ever feel his arm about her again? Would she ever feel—

She flung the book which had lain on her lap, her finger between the first and second pages, all this time, across the lawn as she sprang to her feet. It was an English novel armed to withstand the impact; but in any case it was only a library book, and so might be treated with any measure of contumely.

"What rubbish is his?" she said, not below her breath, *but as if she were asking a serious question of some adviser.*

“What rubbish is this that I am thinking? What business has he to come between me and my thoughts—my true thoughts? He is a common, uneducated, uncultivated lout—he is the unlicked cub that his uncle called him—yes, in spite of his dancing. I suppose there are thousands of men who dance as well as he does—better, if it were possible. And his stories—they were disgusting—the stories of a tap-room of toppers; and he hasn’t the cleverness to invent some excuse that would bring him here to tell me them again to-day.”

She was very indignant with Willie Passmore for elbowing himself between her and her reflections on the subject of Oswald Clifford’s future. She regarded it as a piece of impudence and presumption on his part that was precisely in keeping with the original estimate which she had formed of his character. He was now showing himself to her in his true colours. That apparent act of self-denial—his refusing to come forward and claim her for the dance which she had promised him, while she was sitting with Oswald Clifford—had no sincerity in it.

“Why did he not come forward and insist on my dancing with him?” she said, angrily.

Why, indeed.

This was the charge that she was ready to bring against him.

“He robbed me of that dance!” she muttered. “He is nothing more than a lout. And why did he dance so well—to keep me thinking about him and his dancing when I want to think only of the other—the other whom I love—whom I mean to love?”

She was indignant with Willie Passmore and angry with herself for thinking about him. She should not have thought about him one way or another; and the idea of her advancing him into that position of prominence which was implied by the fact of her being indignant with him was altogether preposterous.

But most unendurable was the reflection that he had not had sufficient cleverness to invent some pretext for being at her feet to enjoy the sunshine of that day with her.

She walked across the grass to pick up the book which had startled the blackbirds in the hedge, and when she was in the act of slapping the leaves straight—it was only a library book, a sort of nobody’s child; but even in founding

hospitals soup is not unknown—when a voice rang out close at hand—a voice as of some one giving an order to a troop of cavalry about to go into action :

“For God’s sake, Miss Cosway, have you seen anything of my nephew?”

CHAPTER XVII.

ON MULES.

THE flush upon her face may have died away before she had set a foot on the grass of the lawn, but at any rate she was pale when she turned and faced Colonel Passmore. His face was not pale; on the contrary, it was greatly flushed. It had the colour of the face of a man inclined to stoutness who had been hurrying along an uneven road.

He had undoubtedly startled her, that was why her left hand had suddenly gone to her heart. She tried to speak, but somehow the words did not come.

He opened the gate and strode beside her. He had taken his hat off—it was of straw—and was fanning himself with it.

“For God’s sake tell me,” he said, hoarsely, as he threw himself into a foolish attitude of appeal, stretching the hand that was disengaged toward her. She fancied that she had seen something like that on the amateur stage. “For God’s sake tell me, where is the boy?”

Then it was that the flush returned to her face.

“What on earth can you mean, Colonel Passmore?” she said. “Why do you come here? How could I possibly know anything about your nephew? You are too absurd.”

“You haven’t seen him? He wasn’t at the ball last night?”

“I believe he was at the ball—yes, he must have been, for I fancy I danced with him—yes, I’m sure—nearly sure, that I danced with him. Still, you know there were so many—he is tall, isn’t he? and his mouth——” She made a little pause.

“Large—large—it is; ah, you’ve described him down to the ground,” cried Colonel Passmore. “You saw him there—at that ball? At what hour?”

He had whipped out a pocket-book and was turning over the leaves in search of one that was blank.

"At what hour did you last see him?" he enquired, in a voice made comic through his teeth being closed firmly on the pencil; he required both hands to manipulate the pocket-book, for it was about the size of a small ledger.

"How on earth can I tell at what hour I saw him—or if I saw him at all?" she said, rather indignantly.

"I must write out a complete description for the police," said the Colonel; and as a matter of fact he had already begun to make entries in his book, having at last found a moderately blank page. "Yes, I flatter myself that I know how to draw up an official report. I've done a few in my time. 'Time when last seen—unknown'—that's what you have said, isn't it?"

Her desire to hear all about the matter got the better of her longing to snub that very foolish man who was standing in front of her with the tip of the pencil on his lips. She had longed for someone to be beside her on the lawn, but certainly this was not the man for whom she had longed.

"Tell me all about it," she cried at last. "He was at the dance. Did he not return to your house—his house?"

"He has disappeared—swept as clear off the face of the earth, my dear young lady, as if he had never been on it—gone without leaving a trace behind," he replied. He had returned the note-book to his breast-pocket, and had buttoned his coat over it, lest any one should make a sudden snatch for it. Besides, it gave him a fine chest.

"Where can he have gone?" said she.

"Where? The river, Miss Cosway—the river that rolls down with its ghastly burdens to the sea—the sea that hides so many secrets."

"Nonsense! he was not the sort of man who would commit suicide."

"You cannot tell. You are only a girl. What can a girl know of the storm-tossed soul? And he was my only brother's only son—his only child! And I was his guardian. His father left him in my charge. The orphan was left in my charge. It was Lord William and Edmund over again. You've heard the lines? Ah, they've been ringing in my ears all day: 'I bade thee with a father's care, my orphan Edmund guard. Well, William, hast thou kept thy charge?'—it so happens that my name is William—that's what made

the thing more impressive! Ah, that voice! it's begun early! How shall I face my poor brother when my time comes?"

He was searching from pocket to pocket for his handkerchief. When he found it, he shook it out of its folds and dabbed his face with it. "'I bade thee with a father's care, my orphan——' Damn that woman! It was all her fault. Dammer! I say."

He spoke and paused as if waiting to see his order carried out with promptness and despatch. "Dammer! she was the cause of it all."

"Don't you believe him, Miss Cosway, if you please," came a voice, with an inflection in it that made one instinctively think of chipmunks, buzz-saws, liberty, and snake stories. "Don't you believe him, my dear. He's a crank."

"Great Lord! She's here!" said the Colonel, solemnly.

And she was.

"Yes; I opine that I'm here," said she.

"She admits it—she actually admits it," cried the Colonel.

"Get," said she.

"Get? Get what?" said he.

"Simply get," said she. "Don't you understand Shakespeare's English? Vamoose! Go away—out by the hickory?"

She gave a jerk of her elbow in the direction of the gate and then turned smilingly to Lily.

Lily gave her a responsive smile.

She was a tall and somewhat thin woman of perhaps fifty. Her hair, that was tucked under a hat that was trimmed with a blue veil, was somewhat gray—not entirely so. Her eyes were very dark and her skin was of the yellow of an antique parchment. But her teeth—Lily perceived in a moment that her teeth were exquisite. As a matter of fact, from the moment she turned round, Lily had never taken her eyes off the lady's teeth.

Then the lady gave a smile of considerable breadth, thereby revealing the fact that she had not merely put the best in front. Her teeth dwindled away in the distance, suggesting an illustration in perspective. Looking at her, Lily seemed to see teeth out to the horizon.

"Store," said the lady when her smile had narrowed sufficiently to make enunciation possible.

"I beg your pardon," said Lily.

"Store," repeated the lady.

"Store? I don't quite——"

"Store teeth—you've heard tell of store teeth? I saw you bidding for them. There's not much real estate in the way of teeth on our side. But then we've dentists—artists; you've no dentists here, only teeth butchers—molar bears—better say it at once. But you're all right. Young as you are, you've still got quite lovely rows. You haven't experienced the deceitful joys of Mark Antony H. Hustler's masticating gum."

"She talks of teeth and gums at this moment," cried Colonel Passmore. "That was a woman for my brother to make the second guardian of his son—his poor son that's now sleeping peacefully beneath the turgid water! But it will all come out at the inquest. I'll have the body dragged for in the cool of the evening. She told him that he was a man, and that he was to show if he couldn't work out his own independence—that was her very phrase."

"Old man, get. There ain't much of a show for you here. Drag away."

"Madam," said the Colonel with dignity, facing the lady who had just spoken. "Madam, let me tell you—that—that——"

"Well?" said the lady, with an inflection of interrogation. "Well?"

"Let me tell you that—Christopher Columbus was a greatly overrated man. That will come out at the inquest, too. I'll show America up."

"Ain't that playing it a bit low down—to round on poor old Chris?" said she, with an accent of polite, but not obsequious enquiry.

The Colonel looked at her; his lips moved, but no voice came from between them. She smiled—"kinder scornful," as she afterwards explained—and with a snort Colonel Passmore wheeled about and marched through the gate.

"My name is Imogene Q. Larkspur, Miss Cosway," said the lady. "I have a constitutional aversion to obtruding. I'm obtruding now, but I only followed that old man to try and keep him from buzzing around overmuch. He's been making things hum with us all day; and he doesn't move as light as a yellow bug over the flowers. I'm associate guardian with him of Willie Passmore. But why George Passmore should choose that fresh-water clam to have anything to do with his boy ain't altogether diaphanous. It'll take

me working fourteen hours a day to counteract him. The lad'll pull through."

"But why on earth Colonel Passmore should come to me to make enquiries about your ward, I can't understand, Mrs.—"

"Miss."

"Miss—"

"Imogene Q. Larkspur."

"Miss—Larkspur."

"That's his crank," said Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur, with another toothsome smile. "He's just calculated"—she did not pronounce it "calkerlate," Lily noticed—"that you would be at the dance, and maybe the lad might hum something in your ear in regard to his interests and purposes."

"Why on earth should he—he—hum in my ear, Miss Larkspur?" asked the girl. "I only spoke to him twice in my life—perhaps three times. Why should he not—hum in the ear of someone whom he knows well?"

"Best enquire of the Cun'l, Miss Cosway," said Miss Larkspur—she certainly said "Cun'l," Lily noticed. "Don't blame me for his crank. When I heard that he had gone I made a bee-line here in his wash. I've far too great a respect for the Professor to intrude; is he anywhere about?"

"Who?"

"The Professor—your respected paw-pa?"

"He's not a professor; and I daresay he's at his work."

"Miss Cosway, there's no man has a bigger name on our side than Professor Cosway. There ain't a small size chink window that I could squeeze a glance through to see him at work? I'm corresponding with the Sardanapalus *Herald*—the brainiest organ in our State—and I opine that it would boom the Professor a bit over to the Pacific Slope if I was to give three-quarters of a column of flareup heads in front of a descriptive par. of the Professor at work."

"I don't quite—"

"Historian Cosway at his bureau—Stolen Waters are sweet—A Peep at the Professor—How he runs the ink-hydrant—Full Pressure with the juice of the gall-nuts! How's that for head-lines?"

"You are so amusing," said Lily. "Papa will be quite pleased to meet you—only not to-day—of course. We must *always give him notice* before he meets anyone. He's so *fond of America*: the people there buy his books so well,

and now that the publishers keep their hands from picking and stealing, they send him thousands of pounds. Oh, yes; he thinks very highly of America—now.”

“I’ll cable that to Sardanapalus City. ‘Cordial relations between Professor Cosway and the States’—that’ll gratify the great Amurrican people, Miss Cosway.”

“Oh, if you are satirical, papa will love you, Miss—Larkspur. Only you’ll be no match for him. But I should like to hear something about Mr. Passmore. He didn’t return home after the dance?”

“Not up to one o’clock to-day. But there’s nothing the matter with Willie Passmore. He’ll strike out for himself one of these days.”

“Yes, that’s quite likely. He has done so before—he told me.”

“He’s got some sand in him, but it’s low down: it needs to be stirred up a bit. Does the Professor use a fountain-pen, and if so, whose make is it? That’s what thirty millions of human souls are waiting to hear in the States, Miss Cosway.”

“They’ll hear everything in good time, Miss Larkspur. You can’t keep any news of importance out of America. And now I’m sure you’ll be able to tell us on this side what’s done with all the pies that are made by the American women. They can’t eat them all, you know—even thirty millions of people have their limits. Miss Larkspur, who eats all the pies?”

Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur was grave for a few moments, then she began to smile. She looked cautiously around, and then whispered in Lily’s ear—

“Miss Cosway, that’s a secret that’s only known to a few folk on our side. I can tell you what becomes of the pies: the lady novelists use up all that are made. There’s a pie foundry in our State, and the man that runs it says that one authoress alone in her last three books has used up all the pies that he has turned out in as many months. The New England lady writers are just mammoths at pies.”

“That’s quite satisfactory,” said Lily. “The question has caused a good deal of discussion on this side.”

“Any other Amurrican institution that you’d like explained, Miss Cosway?—you’ve only to nominate it.”

“I don’t know of anything else, Miss Larkspur, unless—*how about that mule?*” said Lily.

"That muel? Which muel, Missy? I reckon we've more than one muel in the States."

"I never heard of any but one. The comic mule that kicks. Isn't it about time that you turned him into a nice green paddock to enjoy the leisure of an honourable old age? He's a bit hoary, now, poor old chap! He can't have a kick left in him."

"He was kicking away through the pages of three magazines when I left the States—kicking away as lively as a chipmunk. He has kicked many an author into celebrity. Miss Cosway, we're the most independent nation in all God's footstool; but our humourists ain't developed so far as to superannuate that muel. But for that muel, the Amurrican Continent would be as dull as your England. He keeps us lively. No, Miss Cosway; take away our Tammany, our dime museums, our everlasting Spread Eagle, and the Flag o' Freedom, but leave our muel."

"I will," said Lily. "Feed him well, and maybe I'll see him some day."

"You'd best hurry," said Miss Larkspur. "He's using his heels at the present moment. He's kicking the Amurrican Continent into the Pacific Ocean. If you don't hurry there won't be enough left for you to stand on to see where it once was. But you may bring all the wits on this side with you when you come. They won't take up much space. So far as I can learn on this side, wit is that element in literature which is unfit for publication. Leave us our muel. So long, my dear."

Lily shook hands with her very heartily, her eyes running over with laughter.

"We'll be certain to meet again soon," she cried.

But when Miss Larkspur reached the gate, she paused and hastened back to where the girl was still standing.

"Excuse me," she said; "but could you tell me by way of a preliminary what's the Professor's platform?"

"His platform?" said Lily. "Oh, he has dozens: he lectures everywhere."

"Ah, you don't quite take me up. I should have asked you what was his ticket?"

"It depends on how he intends to travel."

"I beg your pardon. Now why couldn't I ask you at first whose log he rolls?"

"Please don't be so idiomatic, Miss Larkspur."

"Well, I thought the tongue of Shakespere—but, there; what I desiderated to ask you was, is Historian Cosway a Republican or a Democrat?"

Lily looked at Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur with wide eyes for a few moments; then she turned and fled back to the house, closing the French window when she had entered.

"She's just the freshest, sweetest, daintiest bit of English porcelain that ever came before my eyes," said Miss Larkspur, as she walked away. "With a little education, she'd be just perfect."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON JONAH.

LILY gave her father a very complete account of the visit that she had received from the two guardians of Willie Passmore, and, as she expected, he became greatly interested in Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur. (He hoped that he might eventually be able to treat her as a working model of the American woman. He liked to have these things brought to his doors. He was a student of humanity, but he disliked searching for specimens.)

"How liable we are to misjudge people if we pronounce an opinion on them on imperfect data!" said the Historian. "When that foolish Colonel Passmore appeared on the lawn in search of his nephew some weeks ago, I could not help thinking that the boy's father must have been a greater fool even than the majority of millionaires."

"Please give the man a chance, papa; he wasn't a millionaire—only a quarter of one," interposed Lily. "What chance has a man of receiving any respect if you call him a millionaire?"

"It seems then that I did him a double wrong," said her father. "Not only did I accuse him of being a millionaire, but I considered him one of the most foolish men of whom I had ever heard. No man in his senses would appoint Colonel Passmore to be guardian of his son for some years—that was my train of reasoning. But now that you have told me about the second guardian I begin to perceive that the late Mr. Passmore was a great humourist. The retired

officer of Engineers on the one side and the American lady on the other constitute supporters of the shield of the Passmore family that suggest an appreciation of more than the elements of burlesque."

"They do indeed; but what about the representative of the family of Passmore between the two guardians?"

"Master Passmore needs no guardians," said the historian in a sort of "Britannia needs no bulwarks" tone of voice. "If he has any sense of humour he'll stand by and study the complications of the comedy prepared for him by his father."

"He may not have a sense of humour. I don't suppose he has. He may look on the entertainment so thoughtfully arranged for his spare moments by his father in the light of a tragedy. There are some people who never know until they are prompted what is tragedy and what is comedy."

"He will find a prompter. Perhaps he's looking for one now, and that's what delays his return and causes his uncle some perturbation. He will succeed in life in spite of his starting with all the obloquy that attaches to a partial millionaire."

"Oh, for that matter we're all partial millionaires."

"Yes; we all spend money, and there's not a millionaire in the world who doesn't owe his millions to the spending of money—yes—on advertising."

Lily had by no means forgiven Willie Passmore for interfering as he had with the course of her morning thoughts. She could not so easily forget how he had pushed himself into the foreground while she was occupied with her pleasant thoughts about Mr. Oswald Clifford and his many memorable qualities. She was not inclined to take the same optimistic view of his future as her father seemed inclined to take. As for his succeeding in life—why, what had he to succeed in? He had more money than he could possibly spend, however long he might live—unless, indeed, he went about among the tenants of the houses that he owned—the Cottage was one of them—asking the tenants as he had asked her father, what improvements they would like to be done.

Lily Cosway did not know very much about business, but she was perfectly well aware that no fortune, however large it might be at starting, would be left to the house-owner who would attempt to carry out all the improvements that might be suggested by his tenants.

No, she felt that, in considering the position of Willie Passmore, it would be wise to assume that he had attained success already. It was extremely unlikely that he would do anything in the world that would bear to be regarded as a more notable achievement than he had accomplished when he was born the son of a wealthy man. That act was to be considered his *chef-d'œuvre*. Everything after that must represent the falling away from an ideal.

Still, there was a good margin of falling away in a quarter of a million of pounds—that was the sum with which Mrs. Fowler had accredited him, Lily remembered. Oh, yes; a considerable time must elapse before a man starting with two hundred and fifty thousand pounds could be regarded as a failure in life; so that, perhaps, Willie Passmore might be looked on as a success until the end of his days.

But this was a very different thing from achieving success in the course of his life, and her father's phrase implied the achievement.

Oh, he wasn't worth the mental effort entailed in the weighing of phrases.

Only where was he now?

When she thought of the gloomy view taken (with a burlesque of tragic attitudes and tragic delivery) by the Colonel of the present position of his ward, she laughed. No, Willie was not the one to try and better his situation by suicide. How did she know that, was the whisper that sounded in her ear. Oh, she knew it by his dancing. No one could possibly be a better dancer than he was. And this assurance was quite enough to silence the whispering voice—a fact which must be accepted as proving that the whispering voice was not great at logic. The man who has just stolen three waltzes belonging by right to other men from a very pretty girl—she knew that she was a very pretty girl—and who parts from that girl on very friendly terms—who has, moreover, interested that girl in stories of bloodshed, is never the same man that comes to the surface of a grayish river a day or two later with the teeth of the drags hooked under his limp arms.

It was in keeping with the burlesque of tragedy indulged in sincerely—that was how it came to be the perfection of burlesque—by the Colonel, that the subject of it should be the most unlikely subject in the world for tragical treatment. *But Lily could not avoid a little uneasiness, in spite of her*

assuring herself several times that Willie Passmore was quite old enough and adventurous enough to take care of himself. It was, she felt, quite preposterous that he should be left to be treated as a child under the terms of his father's will. It was quite absurd that he should not be a free agent until he arrived at the age of twenty-five. The exquisite humour which her father perceived in the provision of guardianship was not so clear to her, now that she came to think . . .

But what on earth did she mean by allowing her thoughts to be concentrated upon the question of the right of Willie Passmore to complete personal independence? What was it to her, she asked herself, if he were surrounded by a cordon of guardians? What was it to her if it were decreed that he should not come of age until he was forty? What did she care if he were not to enter on his inheritance until he had attained discretion—a contingency which involved, she feared, a long postponement of his independence?

She was more annoyed than ever at the persistent way in which that youth pushed himself into prominence in her thoughts, taking the place of other subjects—much more worthy subjects not necessary to be specified. Was this day of perfect beauty to be thrown away upon thoughts of Willie Passmore?

She flung off her morning dress and put on another, with a straw hat, and walked away to put some questions to her friend Minna Talbot dealing with matters of far more moment than the present or the future of Mr. Passmore. There were rumours in the world of apparel of the approach of a frock so short as to display the full round of an ankle—assuming that ankles are round; and a League had just been formed, including several ladies of notorious virtue (they were excessively plain) in London to denounce it. They had taken an oath to oppose the innovation, and had even gone the length of declaring with great firmness, that nothing would tempt them ever to assume such a costume, even though it should be adopted by every *demi-modaine* in Paris, and everyone knows that what the *demi-monde* wears to-day all Europe will wear to-morrow.

This was the subject which Lily was anxious to discuss in *all its bearings* with Minna: it opened up some questions *that were well worthy of thought*—unlike the question of

Willie Passmore's future—and made a journey to the Tower quite necessary. Lily thought very strongly on the subject of the New Frock, and still more strongly on the subject of its opponents. It was little short of a national scandal, she thought, that a dozen women of well-known virtue should endeavour to override a million or so girls with dainty ankles (she counted herself one of the million or so).

She had just made the turn on the carriage drive that exposed the full front of the mansion, when she became aware of the fact that Minna was sitting on a garden chair, and that Oswald Clifford was on another chair not many yards away, with a cup in his hand. The little table with the tea-tray stood at one side with all the discreetly severe air of a chaperon. Somehow it seemed to Lily that that tea-table was efficiently discharging the duties of a chaperon.

"I wonder if you have seen anything of Mr. Passmore to-day?" said Lily, even before she had taken the third seat, which Mr. Clifford brought forward for her.

The instant that she had spoken, she felt herself flushing all over—from her forehead, over which the twisted gold hairs held the gold of the afternoon sunshine, down to her ankles, the gold clocks of which would (it was her hope) be fully displayed by the introduction of the New Frock.

What on earth caused her to speak of Willie Passmore? She inwardly raged against herself for doing so, and her feeling against Willie Passmore ran very high also for being mean enough to lend himself to the plot for her confusion. No man with the instincts or feeling of a gentleman would have done so.

"Mr. Passmore?" said Minna. "We have seen nothing of Mr. Passmore—at least I have seen nothing of him."

"Oh, I thought that, perhaps, you might have been driving and so have seen him—you take an interest in him, don't you?" said Lily. She was weakly trying to cover her retreat from the well-defined boundary of her confusion.

"I don't think he'd like my saying that I took an interest in him," said Minna, laughing quite pleasantly. "People take an interest in Zenana missions, the exploration of the Holy Land, Shakespere's sonnets, but Willie Passmore—I don't think he'd like to be patronized."

"I scarcely meant it in that way," said Lily. "Only you know you said you liked him the evening he came to apologize and went away without leaving much of an apology."

behind him. Yes, we all thought it so curious of you to like him. He really has no brains."

"I can't say that I came to that conclusion after I knew him," remarked Oswald. "But if he hasn't brains, that's no reason why some people shouldn't like him."

"I suppose it isn't," said Lily. "I think, you know, that I'm beginning to like people without brains."

"I hope so," said Oswald. "If you don't, a very select circle will come in for your regard. But what about Willie Passmore? Beaters are not surely in search of him?"

"His uncle came into the garden of our cottage just now with a long and foolish story," said Lily.

"Oh, his uncle. Ah, there you are, Miss Cosway; if you are sincere in your wish to learn to like the brainless you have a fine fresh field for your enterprise in Colonel Passmore."

"I think I'd rather commence on someone not quite so difficult," said Lily. "I shouldn't like to be discouraged at the outset."

"And Colonel Passmore is discouraging," said Minna. "But what was the story about his nephew—leaving out the foolishness?"

"He was at the Ball last night," said Lily, "and his uncle took it for granted—I don't know why—that he would be certain to dance with me; so as the nephew hadn't returned to his home up to the hour of noon to-day, Colonel Passmore thought it his duty to come to me to get my evidence—the possible evidence that I might give at a possible inquest."

"I've more regard for Willie Passmore than I ever had," cried Oswald.

"Not to make too fine a definition of your regard," said Lily.

"Oh, increase the breadth of the definition as much as you please," said Oswald. "If our friend Willie has actually thrown off the shackles and struck out for himself in the world, he'll have my sincere regard. I said that one day he'd strike out for himself."

"I suppose a man cannot but like those who act as he prophesied they would act," said Lily, sagely.

"Yes," said Minna, "a man should like the people who pay the highest compliment to his judgment."

"Do you remember the case of one Jonah?" said Lily.

"I don't recall the compliment," said Minna. "But the story is the best that was ever written in the world about a man."

"Yes; he wanted a million of people to be killed in the most horrible fashion in order that his beggarly little reputation as a second-class prophet might not be jeopardized."

"He was a man," said Minna.

"I am overwhelmed," cried Oswald. "I repent in sack-cloth and ashes like the men of Nineveh. Avert the fire and brimstone."

Sir George Anderson came up the drive in his dog-cart from the railway station. He dismounted at the hall door and walked in his usual dignified way toward the group at the tea-table. Oswald rose and shook hands with him.

"You have come in good time, Sir George," said Lily. "We were talking about fire and brimstone and Willie Passmore. Where is Mr. Willie Passmore?"

"He is in the county gaol," said Sir George, gravely.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON DECIMALS.

A CHILLING silence followed Sir George's announcement. Minna looked at Lily, and Oswald looked somewhat anxiously at Minna's face. Lily was quite pale as she looked at Sir George.

Sir George at once assumed the pained expression of a man who is glad that he has to tell a piece of news which is greatly to the discredit of someone.

"It is a most deplorable story," said he.

"You had better have a cup of tea before telling it," said Minna, who knew Sir George better than anyone present.

"I think I will, my dear," said Sir George, and he began to take off his gloves, his pained expression increasing visibly with the effort.

"In gaol?" murmured Lily. "In gaol—and such a lovely day as it has been."

In gaol. She thought that perhaps that was why he had *not been with her* on the lawn in the morning.

"I knew he would strike out an original line for himself," said Oswald, thoughtfully.

"There's not much originality in the County Gaol, sir," said Sir George.

"Nor in striking out, I suppose," said Oswald.

"Nor in striking out—that was where he made the mistake," said the narrator.

"What! did he beat someone?" cried Lily, jumping up.

"Yes; it appears that it was a gross and wholly unprovoked assault," replied Sir George. "He must be a young man of most ungovernable passions."

He did not know how interesting he was making the young man in the eyes of the young women. He took a sip from his cup.

"Yes," he resumed, "it appears that last night—to be exact, at 2.17 this morning—it was all deposed on oath at the Police Court to-day—he followed Mr. Carr—his father is the chief director of the Uttershire County Bank—you know, of course."

Oswald said "Of course" by a nod of the head, though it so happened that he had never heard the name of Mr. Carr before.

Lily Cosway had: she remembered that the name of Carr had been written on her dance card opposite the first waltz that she had danced with Willie Passmore.

"He followed young Carr down Royal Avenue and made some insulting remarks to him—challenging him to fight—threatening to—to—well, to inflict physical punishment upon him."

Oswald smiled, but below his breath, so to speak—the merest cat's-paw of a smile—at Sir George's adaptation of the phrase "punch his head." He knew that Willie's threat of physical punishment had assumed this form.

"Physical punishment for what?" enquired Minna.

A little sigh moved in Lily's throat as a fledgling stirs in its nest.

"For what?" repeated Sir George. "For what? That did not transpire in the evidence given by Mr. Carr. The unfortunate gentleman said he had never spoken to young Passmore—the prisoner—in all his life."

"Ah. But did he say if young Passmore had ever spoken to him?"

The question came from Lily. She was flushed. Her eyes were bright.

The narrator turned and gazed upon her—sadly—patiently—pityingly.

She was so young.

And such a girl.

“Mr. Carr said—he was on oath—that he had never spoken to young—the prisoner before. It seems pretty clear that the latter was under the influence of drink—at least that he had drunk too much champagne at the Mayor’s dance.”

Sir George seemed anxious to deal with judicial impartiality with Willie Passmore, but at the same time to be as lenient as was consistent with the dignity of the Bench in his references to what had occurred.

“So they fought, and Willie Passmore knocked the head off him,” said Miss Cosway, B.A.

“No,” said Sir George, sternly. “There was no fight. Only an assault—a gross and unjustifiable assault. A policeman witnessed it—fortunately.”

“For Mr. Carr,” remarked Lily.

“For the ends of justice,” said the perpetual ex-Mayor.

“And the sentence?” said Oswald, interrogatively.

“Fined five pounds and costs with the alternative of twenty-one days, and to be bound over in two sureties of two hundred pounds each to keep the peace for six months.”

Sir George had cleared his throat and had repeated the judgment of the court so impressively as to cause his auditors to feel that they had been individually sentenced to the penalty incurred by Willie Passmore. They were proportionately dejected.

Lily had turned from red to white, just as a culprit in the dock might have done.

“Yes; justice must be done even upon a youth who is worth probably a quarter of a million,” said Sir George, as though adding a rider to the sentence he had pronounced. “Yes; it was only to be expected that the sentence should be a stiff one; the assault was a gross one, and the chairman of the Bench was Atkins of the Warehouse Company. Everyone knows that the Uttershire County Bank have allowed the Warehouse Company to overdraw to the extent of forty thousand. If the Bench hadn’t shown their sympathy with young Carr, the Warehouse Company would never have got another penny from Carr’s father, the Director of the Bank.”

"Of course; the ends of justice must be satisfied," remarked Oswald Clifford, with great composure.

Lily turned to him. He saw that she appreciated the force of his comment. Of course it could not be expected that Sir George would perceive anything more than an honourable acquiescence in his magisterial dictum.

"But how is he still in gaol?" asked Minna.

"The fine has not yet been paid," said Sir George.

"Nonsense! Five pounds?" exclaimed Oswald.

"And costs," said Sir George. "It has not yet been paid. He would not employ a solicitor—the young ass! And when Mr. Marks—he does a little in the money-lending way—small sums, you know, on note of hand—respectable man, too—never charges more than eighteen or twenty per cent.—offered to pay the fine and costs, he told him to go to—I mean, he refused the offer with insults. Oh, the whole affair has created quite a scandal in Weighborough. Nothing else was talked about in the train to-day. Young Passmore need never show his face in Weighborough again."

"Great heaven! is it so bad as that?" said Oswald.

"Quite. I never knew public feeling to run so high on any subject, unless, perhaps, the building of the new town hall, and that was not a question of morality. Whatever may be said about us at Weighborough, it can never be alleged that we are not a moral community—eleven places of worship and a Jewish synagogue in nine years, giving an average of one, decimal two—counting the synagogue—per annum. No, that young man need never show his face in Weighborough again. We never forgive an appearance at the Police Court."

There was a long silence after he had spoken. It was broken by an outburst of laughter on the part of Lily—a long loud outburst with something of shrillness in its tone. It was not the sort of laughter which induces those who hear it to laugh. It certainly had not such an effect upon any of Lily's friends at the side of the tea-table. It rather made them feel grave.

"Dearest Lily," said Minna, laying her hand on Lily's arm, "do not laugh that way."

"Oh, I must—I must," cried Lily—her laughter had almost become a shriek. "I must—it is all so funny! You said you liked him—that he was honest—straightforward—and now he is in gaol—in gaol! Oh, we know so much about *the real character* of men—we girls! Oh, yes, we are crammed

with all the knowledge that can be squeezed out of books, but we know nothing of the character of men—we're left to find out all that for ourselves as best we can, and nice muddles we make of it! You liked him—Willie Passmore—oh, yes, you declared that you liked him the evening he came here with his apology—which he took away with him again. That shows how incapable girls are of judging; for now he turns out to be a mere rowdy. And I—I—oh, I'd give anything to have seen him fight—to have seen him inflict grievous physical injuries upon that man who would not believe the lie that I told him at the dance."

She threw back her head against the frame-work of the seat and laughed more shrilly than ever. Then Oswald, after glancing at her for a moment, and afterwards at Minna, gave a roar of laughter that completely drowned Lily's shrill treble, and in fact so startled her that her laugh suddenly ceased, and she sat gazing at him through tearful eyes.

"I never knew anything so amusing in all my life," cried Oswald. "You are quite right, Miss Cosway. The way things turn out is very funny; but we all like Willie Passmore, and would be sorry to think of him remaining in the county prison, however comfortable he may find it there. The sentiment of the prison is in itself very uncomfortable—I should know. I was in gaol for a month myself."

"Great heaven!" cried Lily. She had not become hysterical after all. "Great heaven! You beat someone?"

"It was nothing so heroic that I did—Willie has the pull over me there," said Oswald. "No, I was merely sacrilegious—it was in South Thibet. I think I'll look up that young ass and try and bring him to his senses."

He rose, and, turning to Sir George, said—

"I suppose his guardian was telegraphed to, Sir George?"

"He may have been," said Sir George, without a great show of exuberance. "He may have been telegraphed to, though I don't quite see whose business it was to take that step."

"Surely when it was merely a matter of money, someone connected with the Court should have telegraphed to Colonel Passmore."

Sir George gave his shoulders a shrug—a bad provincial copy of the English equivalent to a shrug.

"Pardon me," said he, "it wasn't altogether a question of money: it was the morality of Weighborough that that fool-

ish young man outraged. The feeling is that he was guilty not so much of an individual assault as of an attack upon the respectability—the decorum of our community. He need never show his face in Weighborough again. He will never be forgiven.”

“What did you say was the percentage of church build-ings for the last nine years, Sir George?” asked Oswald.

“One, decimal two, including the synagogue,” replied Sir George.

“I wonder if there are any tables published showing the percentage of Christian charity inculcated in each from year to year,” said Oswald.

He spoke with the greatest courtesy. It was possibly on this account that Sir George failed to perceive the tendency of the question. Courtesy is an element that was never introduced into polemical or political discussions in Weighborough. He was still trying to estimate the exact force of what Oswald had said when the latter picked up a book that was lying on the seat which he had just vacated and handed it to Minna, saying—

“That’s the volume that brought me here to-day, Miss Talbot. I hope you may enjoy it. Don’t be in a hurry to return it. Good-bye.”

“Thank you so much for remembering your promise of last night,” said Minna. “I have been trying for the past month to get the book. Good-bye.”

He shook hands with Lily and Sir George Anderson and walked away.

“What will he do, I wonder?” said Lily.

“Heaven knows,” said Sir George, solemnly. “They say that travel expands the mind. Never was there a greater mistake promulgated. That man no more understands the force of public opinion at Weighborough than that young ass Passmore does.”

He turned and walked into the house with his lips slightly pursed out.

The Weighborough merchants invariably pursed out their lips when alluding to the religion, the morality, the commercial integrity, and the public spirit of Weighborough.

When people outside the municipality referred to the same abstractions, their lips were somewhat drawn in, owing to the fact that their tongues were invariably in their cheeks at the *same moment*.

"My dearest, forgive me," cried Lily, putting her arm across Minna's shoulders.

"Forgive you? What have I to forgive you for?" asked Minna.

"I tried to excuse that idiotic laughter of mine by saying—what I did say. Minna, dearest, I felt spiteful—just like any commonplace girl."

"You could never feel like a commonplace girl on any point."

"Don't say that, please. I have come to think, feel, and speak like a commonplace girl—the most commonplace of girls."

"Commonplace girls don't think."

"Then neither do I. I used to think long ago—in the days when I fancied I was learning. Now I've ceased to think. I've begun to feel. I'm a brand plucked from the learning."

"Come up to my room and we'll talk about Willie Passmore and other matters."

And they did.

CHAPTER XX.

ON FRUGICULTURE.

IF Lily Cosway's reflections for the rest of the evening led her to feel that that lovely day had been somewhat wasted so far as she was concerned, Minna Talbot's were rather more pleasing in their tendency—they were pleasing and a trifle puzzling, as she sat at her piano after dinner playing away her imaginings—her dreams of that diamond day of summer set among the emeralds of the Spring.

She wondered if the trees that made the Fool's Paradise quite as delightful as the real Paradise—for a time—ripened under the influence of such a day as this which was approaching its end.

She rather thought that it was just such sunshine as had been around her that brought to perfection all the products of that pleasaunce—the apples that looked so golden but were only gilded, and that, too, with inferior metal—the grapes large and lustrous and luscious that re-

vealed themselves to be wild grapes by which the children's teeth were set on edge—the graceful nightshade and other fruits that were good to look at but deadly to taste.

Yes, she felt convinced that these fruits in the Fool's Paradise are ripened by the sunshine of days that have no business to be sunshiny. The apples that are ripened under an April sky, the grapes that are ready to burst their husks before May has come, are, she knew, to be avoided. If she were to assume that the generous warmth of this day of summer, breaking in upon the spring would be equal in its effects to the sustained glory of July, she would be a fool.

She was not a fool. She did not intend to be a fool if she could possibly avert such a destiny. She had used her eyes and her judgment in the world, and she had long ago come to the conclusion that that spacious pleasance known as the Fool's Paradise was not laid out under the provision of any Public Parks Act: every dweller within its graceful shade laid out and cultivated a parterre for himself or herself. She determined to take no steps whatever toward acquiring a plot.

He had asked her to sit out a dance with him the previous night, and she had done so. They had had no trouble finding a congenial topic on which to converse: it was not the slaughter of tigers with a sequel of crunching bones. It was simply the origin of Persian art. Had it come from Egypt or from the more gorgeous Orient? She had always been greatly interested in the march of the Arts, and Oswald Clifford, she soon found out, had not been content to explore the East with a guide-book in his hand. He had been in Persia with an artist who had written a book on one branch of the art of the country, and that book he had promised to lend her. She had thanked him, and then they had branched off into the Courts of the Alhambra before they were summoned to supper—she had promised to go into supper with him.

He had chosen her supper for her, and she had eaten it opposite to him, and then the man to whom she had engaged herself for the first after supper dance had waited by her side until she had drawn on her gloves.

"I may bring the book over to you?" Oswald said, interrogatively, as she put her hand on the other man's arm.

"It would be so good of you," she replied.

Had she got any idea when she walked about the garden

in the sunshine that he would come to her with the promised book that very day? She had told herself over and over again that he might possibly come to her in the course of a week or two with it; but all the same, she was a long time making a choice of her gown for the afternoon.

When she had seated herself in the garden chair with no book in her hand, she laughed at the possibility of his coming. The chances were that when he had looked out of his window in the morning and had found that the summer had come, he had taken the first train to Weighborough and thence to London. He had told her the previous night, before he had found out how interested she was in Persian Art, and they were still groping about for a topic, that he meant to go up to London almost immediately: he had not had a summer in London for so long a space of time he feared that his face would have been blotted out of the memory of everyone whom he had ever known; but still he was longing for a season with all the ardour of a *débutante*. No, three years of steady travel after five years of intermittent wanderings had not deprived him of his capacity to appreciate all that was delightful in a London season, he had declared. Might he not, therefore, have taken the earliest possible train to London, she asked herself; and she almost succeeded in persuading herself that the book would be brought to her in the course of a week or so by a servant from the Court.

Then she looked up and saw him beside her, and she knew that she had been expecting him all the day.

And now she was running Nocturnes by Chopin into Reveries by Raff, as she made up her mind that she would not make a bid for a plot in that estate of folly.

He was the truest man whom she had ever met. Not being listed equal to a Wrangler of any University, she had not been fascinated by his stories of tiger slaying. He had not thought it necessary to tell her anything of those animals. He was not one of the men who volunteer the narration of such stories. He only told them by invitation, and even then it largely depended on the person who gave him the invitation whether he told a single story or not. No, he became interesting to Minna through another route than that well-beaten jungle-track.

He was the most interesting man whom she had ever met. She had felt that all the time that she was driving home

with Lily by her side when they had left the dance. She felt it now more strongly than ever as she sat running her fingers over the pianoforte keys and making some rather mixed music through the dimly-lighted room.

Yes, he was the most interesting man in the world—of that she was quite sure. But there she was determined that her thoughts of him must end. No further step would she allow them to take her; for she knew that beyond that line which she drew for herself lay the Fool's Paradise. She stood at the railings and peered through them, as it were. She saw the grapes hanging from the wild vines; she saw the Dead Sea fruit gleaming through the leafage; she heard the nightingales weaving their enchantments under the moonlight.

That was all. She turned away from the fascinations that lay one step beyond where she had gone, and the music that slipped from her fingers, said—

“To think him the most interesting man in the world is not to think that he looks on me as the most interesting woman in the world. I have seen nothing; he has seen everything. I know nothing except that I have a heart: he knows everything, and he must have found out long ago that he had one also. Yes, he is the most interesting man in the world; but that is all—that is all.”

She knew that she could stop short at that point. She was not a fool. She had always had her own views of love; and she knew that it was something fundamentally different from being interested in man, however deep that feeling of interest might go. She had never had the least feeling of love—as love was understood by her—for a man. Her heart had never been stirred by the voice of any man; and to love meant, she knew, to be stirred to her heart's depths by the least sound of the voice of the one whom she loved.

She thought of love somehow as she thought of death. It was equally overwhelming—equally absorbing. When it knocked at the door there was no power that could resist it. And it took all of one. That was how it was most like Death: it meant the dividing asunder of the body and the soul, and it took the soul. She felt that when her time came she must be prepared to yield up her soul to Love; and thus she thought of it with awe.

She had laughed at the way Lily had spoken of—was it

love? She had chatted very freely about her determination to fascinate some one—why, it was actually Oswald Clifford whom she had planned to fascinate, although at that time she had never seen him. All that Lily had said flashed upon Minna now. It did not seem very dreadful to Minna, though afterwards poor Lily had confessed that she felt she had been horrid to say such things. Oh, no, Lily had not said anything dreadful, she had only been amusing, as a child is amusing, when it talks of the sun being a sort of confection which it means to swallow at the hour of sunset, if it can only walk far enough to pick it up before anyone else clutches it.

Lily had been vastly amusing, laying out her plans to catch love and, O—yes, to catch Oswald Clifford at the same instant. And then how amusing she had been when they had gone to the drawing-room together—the very room in which she was now playing her thoughts away on the evening of their meeting with Oswald Clifford!

“Talk of Fate,” Lily had murmured, mysteriously. Oh, she had been very amusing. But . . .

With a horribly discordant crash the music suddenly came to a close, for the thought that came to Minna was—

“How if Oswald Clifford were really to love Lily? How if Fate should decree that Lily’s absurdities should become actualities?”

For a few minutes there was silence, then the piano began to sound once more—the melody was in a minor key.

“She is all that is sweet and lovable. May they be happy,” was Minna’s thought.

But the melody that came from her fingers was in a minor key.

She would be quite content (she assured herself) to look at happiness through Lily’s eyes—happiness! Oh, this was absurd. How could she tell what was happiness? She had no right to have a thought linking happiness and Oswald Clifford together. It was such vain imaginings that made the entrance to the Fool’s Paradise easy, and she had no notion of passing beyond the railings—railings that looked like iron, but that were found when approached to be of pith. She was not such a fool as to think of Oswald Clifford with any greater fervour than was associated with her thoughts of any other man in whom she was greatly interested—say, Mr. Cosway, the historian.

But the melody that came from her fingers was in a minor key.

In due time she went to her bed, the result of all her reflections being that she had passed one of the happiest days of her life, and that although she was greatly interested in Oswald Clifford, it was extremely unlikely that he could be more than casually interested in her, having lived in every place in the world where the most interesting women are to be found.

Could anything be more ridiculous than the idea—she would not be idiot enough to entertain it—that the village of Ashdown contained a woman who would interest a man who had travelled over the world more than any of the distinguished women he had met?

No idea could be more ridiculous; and such an idea never was hers.

And yet she felt, before closing her eyes, that her day had been a delightful one.

For though she was a woman of the most equable mind, and perhaps even heart, in the world—though she knew a great deal about herself, she did not know that it is impossible for a woman to be thoroughly interested in a man unless she feels that that man is thoroughly interested in her.

She had never been wooed by a Weighborough man, or, in fact, any other man, though a brother painter of Gerald Talbot's, who had been a visitor at the Ashdown Tower some years before, had professed to be deeply in love with her, and had given her a chance of reciprocating her affection—a chance of which she had not availed herself. He was so eccentric a painter as to lead some people to suppose that he had genius. It was not, however, until he had gone into the black and white line that people perceived that he was not a genius but a disease. His figures that purported to be women resembled nothing so closely as the conventional type of a Gorgon; and the figures that purported to be men were not men but nightmares. He enjoyed some months of popularity—for the monstrous and the morbid have their seasons of popularity in England—and while some men called him a Disease others called him an Interpreter.

It was when he was at the height of his fame that he professed to love Minna—he even offered to Gorgonize her for posterity.

She was good-natured enough to laugh at both his pro-

posals, saying that she preferred that posterity should learn what she was like not what she was unlike.

The consequence was that he took his departure from the Tower, and his next essay in scorbatic art was called "Despair." It consisted of two lips and a gown—the lips on a background of white and the gown on a background of black.

He was her only lover. The Weighborough business men she detested. They agreed that she was cold. When their judgment was repeated to her, she had smiled and admitted with great frankness that she was cold, so far as Weighborough was concerned.

She had had no experience of love in her life; but this did not shake her belief in love. She felt that it would come in its own time, and she was ready to yield her soul to it when it came upon her like Death—a thief in the night.

But it had not yet come.

She closed her eyes.

CHAPTER. XXI.

ON ATHEISM.

IT all appeared in the Weighborough *News Letter*—that wheezy, asthmatic organ which purported to represent the conservatism of the town, and which, indeed, very adequately represented all that was wheezy and asthmatic in the town. The full police-court report of Willie Passmore's escapade appeared in the columns of the *News Letter*, and Sir George Anderson read out every word of it to Minna at breakfast.

He explained to her beforehand that the proprietors of the newspaper—one of them had been a gentleman, but he had died—had had a family feud with Willie Passmore's father, and the representatives of the family who were still connected with the paper were not likely to forget the facts of the feud when they had a chance of doing an ill turn to some one of the name of Passmore. If it had been a Weighborough business man who had got into trouble at

the police court, nothing about the matter would have appeared in the *News Letter*.

"Minna said, "Of course not."

She had long ago come to know something of the ethics of Weighborough and the Weighborough *News Letter*.

Then Sir George began to read out the report of the case. He omitted no word; and his native dulness emphasized the baldness of the report of a case out of which a good deal that was lively might have been made in the hands of a competent journalist.

After all, the worst that could be said of Willie Passmore was, that he had struck a man several times upon the face, apparently without provocation, and that, in consequence, he had spent part of the day in the cells until removed, in default of paying the fine that was imposed on him, to the County Gaol.

But after the report of the case before the magistrates there was a paragraph which said—

"We understand that in the course of the evening the prisoner was liberated, the fine imposed by Their Worships having been paid, and two sureties being duly bound over in the sums mentioned above. We trust that this scion of the house of Passmore will in future be a wiser if a sadder man, having learned that the person of a gentleman of spotless commercial integrity in Weighborough is as sacred in the eyes of the law as a coronetted nobleman."

It was so like the *News Letter*—that moralizing, Minna thought.

"Excellent," said Sir George. "That compliment to young Carr is well earned. The *News Letter* banks with Carr. I wonder who are the sureties."

"Why, Mr. Clifford and Colonel Passmore, of course," said Minna.

"You think that Mr. Clifford would lend himself to such a transaction?" said Sir George.

"Why should he not?" said Minna. "Do you fancy that he would allow Willie Passmore to remain in gaol when a stroke of the pen would set him free?"

"What affair was it of Clifford's?"

"It was not his affair; that makes his taking it up all the more creditable."

"You have strange notions: I can't altogether comprehend their force."

Sir George had risen from the table and was looking at his finger-nails with due solemnity.

"Mr. Clifford made some remark about Christian charity last evening; I didn't quite see its bearing upon the subject of our conversation," he added. "Yes, it was something about the percentage of Christian charity—I've been thinking over it since—in my study last evening—and the more I think about it the less I like it. It borders on the ribald. He has travelled a great deal. Travelling is a great snare. It makes a man dissatisfied with his own natural surroundings. Young Ross went on the Continent for six months last year, and returned actually dissatisfied with Weighborough."

"I don't think that Weighborough people are great travellers," said Minna. She did not expect that he would see what she meant, and he didn't.

"We've too much self-respect," said he. "We've no desire to become possessed either of French popery or German atheism. I'm afraid that Mr. Clifford is an atheist. He sneered at Weighborough at any rate."

"That is scarcely the same thing," said Minna.

"Perhaps not. But the man who would sneer at the abode of commercial integrity can have little moral consciousness. I hope he will not become a regular visitor here."

"I think it extremely unlikely. Mr. Clifford belongs to the County."

Sir George indulged in the luxury of a frown—a small one, but still distinctly defined. He could scarcely fail to understand his ward's meaning. He had been striving for years to obtain a footing in the County, but as yet he had met with no success.

He went out of the room and shut the door—as usual—very gently behind him.

Minna wondered if he would have the courage to suggest that Oswald Clifford should never visit the Tower. She thought it extremely unlikely that he would take such a step. She knew how anxious her guardian had always been to get a County position. That was the aim of all the mercantile classes at Weighborough, and some of them—they had usually lent money to the representatives of some of the County families—had achieved quite brilliant successes in this direction. One Weighborough man had actually gone so far

as to be invited to drink a glass of sherry in the billiard-room of the deputy master of the fox-hounds on a bitter November day, after a long ride to hounds; and another was reported to have taken lunch with a rural dean.

With this brilliant series of social successes constantly before him, Sir George Anderson could not despair; surely he had every room to expect that his ambition would one day be achieved.

But if he were to hint to Oswald Clifford that his visits—assuming that he would ever pay another visit, which, perhaps, Minna was overbold in doing—should be discontinued, what would happen?

Would she be content to say good-bye for evermore to Oswald Clifford at her guardian's bidding?

A flash came into Minna's eyes—a flash of light that would have surprised her guardian had he seen it—a flash that would have surprised those of her friends who called her cold—a flash that would have surprised even her friend Lily, who knew that she was anything but cold. Immediately afterwards, however, a laugh broke from Minna that would have neutralized the effect of her flashing eyes, had anyone seen the flash and heard the laugh.

The laugh was the laugh of one who taking an afternoon stroll sees the reflection of the setting sun on the windows of his house and fancies that the whole house is on fire, but finds out his mistake in a moment.

“A false alarm!” she cried.

That afternoon she drove with Lily to leave cards upon the Mayoress—Lily bound her down by a solemn promise not to enter the house. Oswald Clifford was in his high phaeton at the porch of the Firs when the victoria drove up. His groom was delivering his cards at the door.

“You went to Weighborough last evening, after all,” said Lily.

“Yes, I went there,” said he.

“And you did not return alone,” said Minna.

“I did not set out with the intention of returning alone,” said he, with a laugh. “I returned in the company of a very reserved young man and a very unreserved elderly one.”

“The newspapers are not reserved to-day,” remarked Minna.

“I'm afraid that our young friend was grossly in the wrong,” said he.

"No," said Lily, firmly, "he was in the right."

"Then he was in the right," said Oswald, quietly, and without a smile—Lily was not smiling. She looked at him and felt that it was impossible that she could ever have a liking for any man except him, and all because he had refrained from smiling at that moment.

"And now he is safe at home with a little further experience of a world which he says is no place for respectable people."

It was at this point that Oswald laughed. So did Minna—so did Lily—after a little pause.

"He was not in the wrong," said she. "It so happens that I know all about the business—yes, by the merest accident."

"Oh."

"Yes; but I don't suppose Mr.—the prisoner at the bar said anything about that," she continued.

"You are right," said Oswald. The groom returned from the hall-door and stood at the horses' heads.

"I'll tell you all—some day," said she.

"The story is certain to be interesting," said he. "Meantime I dine with the freed man to-night. There is an aunt."

"The most amusing woman in the world," cried Lily. "But I thought it was understood that no respectable person would ever speak to him again."

"Perhaps. Anyhow, I'm dining with him" said Oswald.

"Then no respectable person will speak to you again," cried Lily.

"Then shall we say good-bye now or arrange for a formal farewell?" he cried.

She flushed very prettily—as he thought—when he had spoken.

"I'm afraid that we should make bad boycotters," said Minna. "At any rate, we'll hope that Mayfair will not be convulsed at the news of your act of daring. The judgments of Mayfair would have as appalling results—almost—as the judgment of Weighborough."

"You take too sanguine a view of the charity of Mayfair," said he.

"When do you go to London?" she enquired.

"When do I go to London?" he repeated; he did not say the words so fluently as she had said them. "Well, the fact is that—yes, on looking over the books of my few paternal

acres I find that there is so much that wants—well, looking after, it would be absurd—criminal—for me to run away to London or anywhere else for some months to come.”

“You’re not going to London?” said Lily.

“Not just at present, at any rate,” said he.

“Oh.”

The footman returned at this point, having duly deposited the cards of Miss Talbot, Miss Cosway, and Sir George Anderson.

“Home,” said Miss Talbot.

The man mounted the box.

“Good-bye,” said Miss Talbot, turning once again to the phaeton.

“*Bon appétit!*” said Miss Cosway, with a radiant nod.

“Thank you,” said he, raising his hat. “They say that the man who is about to be executed invariably eats a hearty breakfast. I daresay that I’ll not be wanting in appetite to-night. Good-bye.”

The Mayor of Weighborough stood in his shirt-sleeves in his study. He had levelled a single lath of the Venetian blind of the window of that apartment, and from this position of advantage he was able to sweep with a glance the greater part of the carriage drive.

“Fletcher Fowler, Fletcher Fowler,” said he, as Oswald Clifford’s pair of chestnuts provided an hour’s work for a gardener on the gravel. “Fletcher Fowler, did you ever think in the old days when you were selling gloves for another man at one and elevenpence three that a County swell like that would be sending the gravel flying opposite your ’all door?—not shop door, mind—’all door—’all door?”

The Mayoress of Weighborough stood with her eyes at a levelled lath of the Venetian blind on the back drawing-room window, while Sir George Anderson’s bays were making bald patches with their forefeet in the gravel of the carriage sweep.

“Mary Ann Fowler, don’t let anybody try and persuade you that you’re not on a level—except in regard to education, which is an accident—with the best of them that comes to leave cards on you. Miss Talbot’s spring mantle is an altered six seventeen nine from last summer’s stock; and Miss Cosway’s short velvet cloak is a theatre wrap cut down, with new trimming. If either of them thinks because Mr. Clifford of Ash Court talked to them quite affable and like the gentle-

man he is that they've ground for hope in that quarter, they're fools. I know the County. They're affable when it suits them—'orty as a rule."

"Minna," whispered Lily, when the victoria had gone a mile along the road. "Minna, it's quite out of the question that I could ever care the least for any man in the world except him."

"Him—*him*?" said Minna.

"Him. Great heavens! do you mean to suggest that you don't know to whom I refer? In my himnology there's but one name written."

Minna gave her head a little shake and glanced meaningly—warningly—in the direction of the box seat.

Lily lay back among the cushions, a look of seraphic contemplation upon her pretty face.

But when she was giving Minna a cup of tea in the drawing-room at the Cottage, and had taken the first sip out of her own cup, she repeated her words:

"It's quite out of the question that I could ever care for any other man than him."

"How nice!" said Minna. "When was that conclusion forced upon you?"

"To-day—only to-day," replied Lily. "I admit that I had a certain amount of admiration for him the first evening we met, and that it was strengthened by his story of how he killed the tiger, and how the tiger nearly killed him; but I need hardly tell you, my dearest, that such a feeling is very different from the other."

"The other? What other?"

"What other? Oh, Minna, how can you pretend to such denseness?"

"I have no difficulty, I can assure you. What is the other?"

"The other is the feeling which overwhelms me at the present moment, and has never ceased to overwhelm me ever since——"

"Ever since? Ever since when? Ever since what?"

"How can you ask? Why, of course, ever since he promised to stand by Willie Passmore!"

Minna looked at her, and then burst into the merriest laugh that Lily had ever heard come from her. As a rule, she did not associate merriment with Minna. But when she laughed, she laughed heartily. Most hearty of all her laughs was that which she now gave, though Lily looked blankly at

her, not being able to see any cause for merriment. The confession of a grand passion was not susceptible of jocular treatment—at least, its treatment from that standpoint was quite inconsistent with any profession of sympathy on the part of the jocular person.

Lily felt this very strongly, and made a remark to that effect to Minna, who expressed sincere contrition.

“You must pardon me,” said Minna, “but really you put the matter so funnily—well, not funnily—I should have said forcibly——”

“That you are forced to laugh?” said Lily. “I’m afraid that you’re laughing at Willie Passmore. But there I think you make a very great mistake. Willie Passmore can’t be such a fool when he has managed to win Mr. Clifford as his friend.”

“That’s exactly what I believe with all my heart,” said Minna. “Willie Passmore is certainly to be congratulated upon—upon his friends.”

“Do you suppose that Willie Passmore cares anything for what the people of Weighborough think about him?” continued Lily. “He cares about as much for them as papa does. They don’t buy any books at Weighborough—unless day-books and ledgers; and papa can afford to laugh at them, and so can Willie Passmore. A man with a quarter of a million at his banker’s may smile now and again when he thinks of the prospect of being boycotted by a community of shop-keepers. But he can laugh outright—I don’t know whether or not you ever heard Willie Passmore laugh; I think he does it very heartily—yes, he can laugh outright at the shop-keepers when he is sitting down to dinner with the representative of one of the best families in the County.”

“You are perfectly right,” said Minna; “and you may be perfectly certain that Willie Passmore will avail himself to the uttermost of his privilege of smiling as well as laughing. By the way, you laughed a little last evening when Sir George brought out the news to us.”

This was the first allusion that Minna had made to Lily’s hysterical outburst.

There was a little pause before Lily said—

“Who could help laughing at the thought of Willie Passmore sitting in evening dress in one of the prison-cells?” cried Lily. “I seemed to see the whole scene as if in a *Punch* picture, only a great deal funnier. Oh, no, we’ll not

throw over Willie Paasmore. I told you about his aunt. She wants to lunch here some day. I'll ask you to come, too."

"Do; I'll be delighted," said Minna.

"I don't think that I could quite ask Willie," said Lily, doubtfully.

"Perhaps not."

"There's really no reason why I shouldn't—only I think I'd better wait for some time. But when I have the aunt we can feel that we haven't thrown him over."

"No doubt. And now I must hurry home."

Minna rose, and Lily walked with her to the garden gate. It was not until they had kissed and actually parted that Lily gave a little cry. Minna turned and waited while she ran along the road at the side of the Cottage.

"I quite forgot," she said, in a whisper. "I quite forgot that he said he wasn't going to London for some months. What does that mean?"

"Didn't Mr. Clifford give us a very good reason for remaining here?"

"He gave us only a wretched excuse. Oh, I haven't lived so entirely in the cloister but that I can see through a wretched excuse even when made by a man. Oh, Minna, it's quite impossible."

"What's utterly impossible?"

"That I could ever think of another man as I think of Oswald Clifford. Good-bye again."

"Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXII.

ON TRACTS.

MINNA had sent the victoria home when she had entered the Cottage with her friend; and now, as she walked the mile between the two houses, she had a little singing at heart. Her heart was singing a little pæan of its own—a pæan whose refrain was, "He is not going to London: what does that mean?"

Even Lily had perceived that the reason which he gave for remaining at Ash Court, after he had made no pretence of looking forward to a season in London, was a shallow one.

Supposing that she had asked him if the capacity to understand the books of an estate was dependent upon an immediate residence upon the estate referred to, what reply would he have made to her. She knew that a book of entries—some on the debtor side, others on the creditor side—could be studied quite as well in London as at Ashdown, and that was why the song that came to her heart contained that refrain—

“He is not going to London: what does that mean?”

But before she had reached her home she had (she fancied) succeeded in bringing herself back to that region where only cold reason and unimpassioned logic have sway—the region in which she had begun to sojourn after she had given Oswald Clifford a cup of tea on the garden chair.

It would not suit her to build up any shadowy castle as a lordly pleasure-house wherein to dwell. To assume that a man who had been in possession of an excellent property for more than ten years, and who was, consequently, what worldly people—and he must have met a good many worldly people in the world—would call a *parti*, had suddenly made up his mind that it would be well for him to remain in the neighbourhood of a country village because he had become deeply interested in a young woman living in that neighbourhood, was to lay the foundation-stone of one of those spectral castles which, when dispossessed of their original occupants, become tenanted with disappointment and despair.

She would not set about drawing the plans of any airy castle, however anxious that earnest architect which sent a beat of pleasurable warmth through her body and on to her face undoubtedly was to set about the business. No, she would not be a fool. She had seen enough of such foolish architecture. And so she began to arrange her household in the region of reason and sober thought.

Where was the temptation to do otherwise? she asked herself; and, of course, her good sense had a ready reply. Temptation?—it did not exist. To start with, she was not in love with Oswald Clifford. No; it was one thing to be greatly interested in a man, and quite another to be in love with him—of so much her reason and common sense could give her ample assurance.

She actually applied to her reason to let her know whether she was in love or not; and her reason, like a chambermaid when consulted by her mistress on some delicate question of

art, smirked her acquiescence. Her common sense was graver when applied to. She knew her place. When her mistress said, "I'm not in love; am I, now?" she said, "No, Miss," and went on polishing tables and chairs and doing other commonplace things for which she had been hired, and which, indeed, she did admirably.

"No, I'm not in love with him; as a matter of fact I haven't seen him often enough to be in love with him: only four times. Four times cannot be considered enough. Therefore I'm not in love with him. Am I?"

(Once more reason smirked her acquiescence, and common sense murmured, "No, Miss.")

"No, I'm not a fool. Such a man is not likely to be given to boyish fancies. He has lived in London—in every part of the world—and yet he is still unmarried. That means that he has an exalted ideal of woman; and would I have the arrogance to fancy for a moment that he is staying in Ashdown to be near me, when all the world is open to him? No; I'm not a fool, and I don't intend to be made one."

Nothing could be more sound than her system of reasoning, and nothing could be more unsatisfactory than the result of its application; for she remained thinking for the rest of the evening—yes, well into the night—of Oswald Clifford in connection with his resolution to refrain from going to London for some months.

(That was because reason has its limits of influence, while the influence of feeling is practically illimitable.)

But, curiously enough, in all her thoughts Lily Cosway had no part—Lily, who had no hesitation in assuring her of just the converse of what Minna had been endeavouring to assure herself—namely, that she loved Oswald Clifford, and that it was quite impossible for her to entertain the idea of loving anyone else.

It was not until the next day that she thought of the persistent way in which Lily had endeavoured to convince her that she could not but be in love with Oswald Clifford. She laughed, as she had laughed before, at the thought of Lily's doing her best to convince herself that she was in love with that man by trying to convince her friend of it.

The idea of Lily's endeavouring to reason herself into a conviction of a grand passion was very amusing to Minna—to the girl who had done her best to prove to herself by the

application of logic in which no flaw could be found, that the suggestions made to her by her heart every now and again were unworthy of consideration, simply because they did not agree with the suggestions made to her (under pressure) by her reason and good sense.

During the next few days she saw nothing whatever of Oswald Clifford; and then her heart began to make some further suggestions to her, the import of which was not so contrary to the dictates of reason. In fact, the suggestions that came to her from both quarters agreed so well as to make her feel some alarm as well as surprise.

She felt that she had been right after all—that the original conclusion to which she had come on her return from drinking tea with Lily was true. Every day was proving with additional force how excellent and how accurate her system of reasoning had been. But instead of feeling the gratification of the logician, who is proved by circumstances to have adopted a proper course of argument when dealing with some perplexing point, poor Minna felt thoroughly miserable that circumstances had shown her to have rightly judged the position of Oswald Clifford relative to herself. That was all she was concerned about. She was quite content to allow the question as to whether she was right or wrong in the estimate she had formed of herself in respect of Oswald Clifford to go into oblivion.

He had not appeared for a week—more than a week. It was in his power to have visited her at least once; for he had told her on that ideal afternoon of that jewel day—that day whose gates, like the gates of the Holy City, had been of pearl—that day whose sky of turquoise had become a heaven of sapphire while she had sat by his side—upon that afternoon he had told her that he had written for another book giving illustrations of the Persian embroideries of the Fifteenth Century, and that it would probably arrive at the end of the week, when he hoped he might be allowed to bring it to her.

Yes, it was on account of that promise that she had found it necessary to assure herself that she had no idea of acting like a fool, and to adopt all the arts of a resolute reasoner to prove to herself that he was a man of far too great experience to have a thought for her except so far as ordinary courtesy might suggest to him.

Well, now the week had come to an end, but still his

promise remained unfulfilled: he had never either visited her or sent a message to her, so that he had actually not thought enough of her to discharge the ordinary obligations of courtesy toward her.

Of course, it was quite likely that the book which he had promised to lend her had not yet been sent to him. But that would only account for her not having received the book. If it had been his desire to see her, he would certainly have made the non-arrival of the book an excuse—as it certainly would be—for calling upon her.

She had business in the village one morning after a lapse of ten days, and walking back to the Tower she met Willie Passmore. When he saw her approaching he looked on each side of the road in a hurried way; but there was no narrow lane by which he might escape coming face to face with her. This being so, he assumed the swagger—something of it—of the society Ishmaelite: the man who is cut by his friends, but who wishes it to be understood that, if he feels it at all, it is with pleasurable emotions. Willie had gone so far as to whistle a bar or two of a popular air—to show that he was in the highest spirits—when people whom he had known very well before his escapade walked past him without a recognition. He thought that the comic melody must convince them that he didn't mind—in fact, that he rather liked being cut by respectable people. Now, however, though he prepared to sound the first notes of the defiant melody, the notes did not come.

He determined to reduce to a minimum whatever embarrassment Miss Talbot might feel in cutting him—he was good enough to assume that she would feel some, though so far as his experience went, the act was one that did not necessarily involve even the smallest amount of embarrassment—by walking in the middle of the road and staring at the hedge on the off side.

“Mr. Passmore, what do you mean by pretending you didn't see me coming?” said Minna, when they were abreast.

He started and took off his hat very meekly. All the Ishmaelitish swagger that he had assumed seemed to drop limply into the ditch.

He took the hand that she offered to him.

“I thought that you would be like the rest of the good people in *this* neighbourhood,” said he.

"So I am," said she. "I'm like all good people, in whatever neighbourhood they may be. It's good to be good, don't you think?"

"I'll take your word for it, Miss Talbot; I've never tried," said he. "Now give me a tract and I'll go on quietly. Mrs. Moulton gave me a tract yesterday. My poor old dad lent her husband five thousand pounds to help him over a tight place, and so saved him from bankruptcy. She admitted as much to me yesterday; she said she wished to reciprocate the obligation an hundredfold—those were her exact words—by saving me from hell fire."

"Perhaps she was sincere," suggested Minna.

"Skilleter of Magdalen says that to be sincere is not necessarily to be interesting," remarked Willie. "Yes, she apologized quite pleasantly for not cutting me. She intended to do it as an example to others, she said, but at the last moment she changed her mind, and she hoped that the Lord would change my heart. She gave me to understand that she had changed her mind in order to encourage the Lord to change my heart, and she hoped that I wouldn't tell anyone that she had spoken to me. She was induced, she said, to take the most charitable view of my crime, as there wasn't anyone in sight whom she knew, and so she couldn't be compromised."

"I'm sorry that I haven't a tract," said Minna. "If you call and take tea with me this afternoon I'll get you one."

"Do you mean to say that you'd allow me to enter your house?" he cried, in genuine amazement.

"Why should I not?" said she. "Is it because you hit a man too hard on the face because he was grossly rude to Lily Cosway?"

"Good Lord! she told you?—she knows?—how the mischief did she find out? I didn't speak a word to anyone about it."

"Of course you didn't," said she. "Do you suppose that either Lily or I would speak to you again if you had? She told me all about it."

"Yes, but how did she know, Miss Talbot?"

"She remembered the name that was on her card opposite a dance that she danced with—well, not with the gentleman who used up all the sticking plaster in Weighborough in consequence of your treatment of him."

"I'm glad she knows," said the youth. "If she knows, and if you understand, the rest of the people may go to——"

"To the booksellers for more tracts," suggested Minna, as he pulled himself up quite sharply.

"Well, that wasn't just what was in my mind," said he. "I wonder what the learned Johnnie thought of the business, Miss Talbot."

"What learned—ah—Johnnie?"

"Mr. Cosway. Did he keep his hair on?"

"His name is Horace; and when I saw him last he did not appear to me to be any balder than was consistent with the exigencies of writing ancient history and looking after a very pretty daughter—she is very pretty, you know, Mr. Passmore, though he doesn't look after her."

"Pretty! My God, she's—she's—ah, what's the good of trying to find a word? I might say that she's rippin', you know; but after all, even that wouldn't quite express what I mean. And she understood; but her dad won't ever let her speak to me again, even if she wanted to—but I don't suppose she would."

"Why not? And do you fancy that Mr. Cosway minds if you annihilate all the business men in Weighborough? I believe he'd rather like it. They don't buy his books."

"Then by the Lord Harry, I'll not go to Mashonaland after all. I'll stay at home and fight Weighborough. That's what Clifford advised me to do before he went away. He said, 'Stay and fight it out.'"

"And so you will, I'm sure. When did Mr. Clifford give you that piece of advice?"

"Just before he went to London—last week."

"Ah. Well, the advice was good, though it did come from Mr. Clifford. You'll not forget to call for that tract? Good-bye."

"You may be sure that I'll not forget. Miss Talbot, you're the best girl I ever met in all my life. You're the sort of girl that any Johnnie would go through fire and water for—only—what did you mean by that bit of sarcasm—*even though*—— Look here, Miss Talbot; I'm sorry that I won't be able to take tea with you, though it was awfully good of you to ask me."

"Oh, yes, you will, Mr. Passmore. Miss Cosway has promised to come to me, too."

"I can't help that. Good-bye. God bless you—you've made a new man of me—only—good-bye."

"Are you a fool? If I hold up my finger, Lily Cosway will never speak to you again."

"Good-bye."

"Oh, good-bye!"

They parted. Her face was flushed. His was pale.

Not a dozen yards separated them when he heard her voice.

"Mr. Passmore."

He turned and was going to her.

"No, no; don't come—don't come. Stay where you are. Listen to me. I was a fool—oh, such a fool! I didn't mean what I said—indeed I didn't mean it—I only meant—oh, you wouldn't understand—I don't understand myself—only—you said he had gone away and he told me that he didn't mean to go, and—oh, what nonsense I'm talking! You'll come to tea, Willie?"

He ran to her—they were alone at a turn of the country road. He caught one of her hands and kissed it a dozen times. Every kiss was a sob. Then he turned and walked away without a word.

She stood on the roadside looking at her hand. It was wet with his tears.

He called at the Tower in the afternoon, and drank his cup of tea by the side of Lily Cosway; but no amount of persuasion on her part was sufficient to induce him to tell her anything of his combat at 2.17 A.M. in the Royal Avenue, Weighborough, with the son of the director of the bank who had honoured the overdrafts of the magistrate who sentenced him the next day—that was how Lily put the matter when she talked about it.

"That's a long sentence," said he; "something like the House that Jack built."

"A long sentence," said she. "A long sentence; I meant it to be so. If you ever learned anything of the art of composition you would know that there should be a certain amount of sympathy between the matter referred to and the manner of the reference. A long sentence indeed."

Willie Passmore hung his head.

She had seen him do so once before.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON MUMMIES.

"UNDOUBTEDLY," said Mr. Cosway, "the American nation is a great one to have survived the Civil War and Webster's Dictionary."

"Don't let anybody tell you, Professor Cosway, that we don't value the friendship of the British above rubies—the best Burmese, the size of pea-nuts," said Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur. "We're a simple people, Professor—didn't we all come over in the Mayflower, with the exception of a small Irish and German contingent that took passages by other lines? Our Puritan ancestry gave the note to the American nation—the note of humility and simplicity."

"A celestial harmony, Miss Larkspur," said Mr. Cosway, humbly.

"Professor, the Amurrican Continent, as you know, is bounded on the North by the Aurora Borealis, on the South by the Procession of the Equinoxes, on the East by the Garden of Eden, and on the West by the Day of Judgment, but if ever an Amurrican is led away to talk steep I opine it is when he reflects that he and Shakespere make themselves intelligible in the same tongue."

"Could Shakespere have foretold this day he might have seen his way to increase the force of his adjectives," said the historian.

"We're satisfied with Shakespere as he is, sir," said Miss Larkspur. "We won't desiderate anything purer than W. S., late of Stratford-on-Avon. He has become part of us, sir."

"*Quis separabit?*" remarked Mr. Cosway.

"Britain has had a brilliant past, Professor—we all allow that."

"It is only just," said the historian.

"But Britain is corked—corked."

"Corked? Corked?"

"Corked. It wants pop!"

"Oh; pop?"

"Now Amurrica is a live place."

"So I am given to understand. Did that go over in the Mayflower also?"

"Sir, the music made by the chain cable of the Mayflower will surge over creation till the Pacific Slope sings the pæan of freedom to the obbligato of the Last Trump."

"And now we'll have some lunch," said Lily.

"Lunch seems a poor thing now," said her father, "though ten minutes ago it appeared not only tolerable but even desirable."

It was a very pleasant little party at the Cottage, though Miss Talbot and Miss Larkspur were the only guests of Lily and her father. Miss Larkspur had paid Lily another visit, a few days after Willie Passmore's escapade, and on Lily's asking her when it would suit her to come to lunch, had said—

"Our Willie talks boulders and shingles about a Miss Talbot. Is she the young woman that Sir George Anderson is guardian to?"

"Yes, Minna Talbot is my dearest friend," said Lily. "Sir George has been her guardian since she was a year or two old."

"I've a sort of wish to meet that Miss Talbot," said Miss Larkspur. "Yes, our Willie has made me interested in her."

"Oh," said Lily, with the least possible degree of coldness.

"That's so. Our Willie seems to think of her as a front-seat saint; one of those that St. Peter can entrust with latch-keys of their own."

"Minna would be so glad to hear——"

"Not she. No live unmarried young woman likes to be thought a saint. Our Willie doesn't consider you to be on a bee-line to saintship, Miss Cosway. He thinks too highly of you for that."

"I'm so much obliged to him."

"He means to compliment you in his mind, poor lad, but like most men his compliments want lubrication. I never felt that I was real elderly until a man on our side told me one day that I was good-looking still. And he only wanted to cement a friendship that had got a bit out of repair."

"But about Minna Talbot. You would like to meet her *here*?"

"That's what I'm trying to say so as not to sound impudent, Miss Cosway."

"She'll come any day that I ask her. But why are you so anxious to meet her? Is it to have the chance of corroborating the judgment pronounced upon her by your nephew?"

"Well, not quite that. But you see I'm on the lookout for types of the young women of Britain, and I'm sure that Miss Talbot is one."

"She's far too nice to be a type. Most girls are horrid, you know. No one with the experience that I have had of girls could do anything except hate them. Men—nice men—are really far nicer; they're so—so—manly."

"Not so manly as some young women I've come upon suddenly. But shouldn't you say now that Miss Talbot was a type of the young women that bring light across the threshold of the poor man's cottage—carrying soup in slabs, and a bottle of wine done up to look like a roll of music?"

"No; those are the sort of girls who like to patronize poor people, and force them to clean up their houses when they might be much better employed. Poor people detest them. They cultivate a sniff—the sniff of the District Visitor. Minna gives away plenty of money, but she doesn't sniff around the cottages. I overheard a gardener who was arranging our greenhouse say to the man who was glazing the broken panes—the gardener had married a housemaid at the Tower, and Minna had given her as a wedding present half a dozen spoons—'She's a real lady, that Miss Talbot—a real lady—gave my missus a present of 'arf a dozen spoons—silver too—none o' yer electrer-plated or finest nickel—no, genuwine silver—something worth pawning.'"

"That's the young woman I want to meet," said Miss Larkspur.

And now Miss Larkspur was sitting opposite to Minna, scrutinizing her features with a curious expression on her own. Lily saw with amazement that tears had collected behind the glasses of Miss Larkspur's concave spectacles.

She wondered if Miss Larkspur was thinking of the days when she was as lovely to look at as Minna—the days when gentlemen anxious to pay her a compliment did not assure her that she was good-looking *still*.

Lily had some imagination—as she herself put it, all her imagination had not been educated out of her—and she was

not the sort of girl who would ridicule the idea of Miss Larkspur's ever having had beauty—not, of course, beauty such as appeared on Minna's calm, exquisite face, with her large grey eyes that seemed to express sympathy with everything that lived, but still beauty such as might charm men into loving her.

Was Miss Larkspur thinking, as she looked at Minna, of what might have been, Lily wondered; and she felt that she appreciated quite fully the pathetic elements of the situation.

Then Mr. Cosway expressed his sense of Miss Larkspur's devotion to duty. "Had she crossed the Atlantic, leaving the many attractive elements on the other side, solely for the sake of acting in *loco parentis* to a youth who had not shown himself to be so tractable as to be wholly devoid of originality?" Mr. Cosway enquired.

Miss Larkspur smiled. She had taken off her spectacles and was wiping her glasses.

"I wanted to see what a British boy was like," she replied. "I wanted to see what chance there'd be for him in the States."

"The States offer many chances to the Boy, I hear," remarked the historian. "Especially to the Boy *plus* dollars."

"It's the land of chance and chances," said Miss Larkspur. "I'm satisfied with our Willie."

"Perhaps that shows that you had not formed an exalted estimate of the British Boy," remarked Lily, with fine sarcasm.

Minna looked at her reproachfully.

Her father look at her philosophically.

Miss Larkspur looked at her wisely.

"What's wanted now-a-days in young men and young women," said Miss Larkspur, "is not smartness, nor learning, but originality. Smartness springs from the liver, learning from one's parentage, but originality comes from the brain. Are you with me, Professor?"

"I'm working up to you gradually, Miss Larkspur," replied Mr. Cosway.

"Learning! What's that that you call learning on this side?" cried Miss Larkspur, looking around the table. "Spending five years maybe to acquire the power to translate badly those works of the ancients that you buy trans-

lated well for a dime? If that isn't a waste of time and tissue I'd like to know what address to go to in order to find a greater. Sir, it makes me tired to hear of young men and young women spending the time that God has allowed to them to train up their digestions in the way they should go so that when they are old they will not depart from them, worrying over dead languages. If the languages are dead, in heaven's name give them decent burial. But to drag out the mummy of a heathen tongue and fling it to a mob of schoolboys to jump on—to maul and to treat with every form of irreverence that a schoolboy can think of—and they have large minds in that way, most of them—is downright indecent. They make an Aunt Sally of a noble work in Greek—they tell us it's noble—and then invite a mob of boys and girls to shy at it. The one that shies nearest to it gets the nuts. That's what they call the higher education, and they say that the lads that spend five years of this life shying at the poor old mummy that they've dug up for fun, have a love for it that compensates them for the loss of their digestion, their eyesight, and most likely their front hair. Are you with me, Professor?"

"I am," cried Lily. "And so would he be if he had the courage to confess it. Isn't that true, dearest father?"

"I watched you burn your books, my dear," said Mr. Cosway.

"I'm what people call well taught," said Lily. "I know everything about the laws of ancient metres."

"But nothing of modern motors?" said Miss Larkspur. "If an electric bell went wrong, you couldn't tell what was the matter."

"Not to save my life—we'd have to send for a man who gets thirty shillings a week from his employer to do the work," said Lily. "But I'm well taught all the same, and I never will read another book in all my life that doesn't deal with something that's manly. I'm alluded to as the most highly-educated girl in England, and, oh, shouldn't I like just to kiss a cowboy."

"It's not a brainy aspiration, Missy; but I don't see much harm in it," said Miss Larkspur. "You might gun around a bit before you'd discover anything more masculine than a cowboy."

"And if he'd want to paint the town crimson after I had kissed him, I'd hold the paint-pot for him," said Lily.

"Now I understand what has puzzled so many people on our side," said Miss Larkspur. "We never could understand how it was that the cowboys and such-like trash got an entry into the parlours of the best families in Britain when they were sent over here."

"If they did—I'm not quite sure that they did—but if they did, it would be quite intelligible to me," cried Lily. "They came to a town that was overcrowded with men wearing spectacles——"

"And liver-pads," suggested Miss Larkspur.

"Quite likely. I've seen the strings of the chest-protector of one of our most brilliant mathematicians," said Lily. "They were always getting over his collar behind when he came to lecture, and we got to detest all chest-protector-wearing animals. Now cowboys don't as a rule wear chest-protectors."

"Not as a rule. If they did, they'd be of steel—bullet-proof," said Miss Larkspur. "But what are your views, Miss Talbot? You haven't spoken a word."

"It appears to me," said Minna, "that the opponents of the higher education would do well to keep Lily out of the way if they wish to succeed on the platform."

"Oh, I pulled myself up in time," said Lily. "I told you the other day that I'm a brand plucked from the learning. Haven't I proved my contention, however?"

"If you hadn't been so highly educated, you wouldn't have made such an excellent attempt in that direction," said Minna.

"This is most interesting," said the historian. "But how about Master Willie Passmore. We began with him, didn't we?"

"I was about to remark," said Miss Larkspur, "that he had originality. It's only one lad in a thousand that gets fired out of a College and makes an appearance for an honourable assault in a dock within a month. Yes; I'm quite satisfied with our Willie."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON MECHANICS.

"THEN you have not made the voyage across the Atlantic in vain," said Mr. Cosway.

"I had more than Willie Passmore in my eye when I came across," said Miss Larkspur. "Willie's paw-pa was an old friend of mine. I was a sort of cousin to his wife—you know I'm not rightly the lad's aunt."

"Oh, merely an American aunt—a purely honorary title," said Mr. Cosway.

"Just. Mr. Passmore died in my father's house, and before he died, poor man! he gave me to understand that he was a bit afraid that Willie would break up his constitution at Oxford College if he wasn't looked after. So he made me promise to look after him when he was gone."

"With Colonel Passmore on the other side?" suggested Mr. Cosway.

"The Colonel's a poor thing, ain't he?" said Miss Larkspur. "A soldier!"

"On the contrary, an Engineer," interpolated Mr. Cosway.

"Well, he calls himself a soldier anyway, and that pretty often. Oh, I'll make a man of Willie in spite of the Colonel."

"Then you came to make a man of our friend Willie?" said the historian. "Do you mean to remain here until you've completed the task, may I enquire?"

"Maybe I'll take him back with me for the finishing. In the turning out of a man the States is a good finishing shop, though I allow that as a nursery your Britain is not far off. But besides our Willie, I've some business that'll keep me within reach of London, England, for a while. Did you ever hear tell of Silas H. Hoffinstein, of Sardanapalus City, Michigan State?"

"I'm afraid that I never heard the name, Miss Larkspur."

"You'll hear it before very long, sir," said Miss Larkspur. "Sardanapalus City is a live place, and Silas H. Hoffinstein

helps makes things hum. He's the greatest living inventor, Professor. It was Silas invented the universal gum-pick. You've heard tell of Hoffinsein's gum-pick?"

"I'm afraid——"

"Ah, that's because you don't chew gum on this side. Well, I rec the young women with us couldn't do without gum, and what they'd do without Hoffinsein's pick, when the gum gets between their teeth, I'm not prepared to say. He also brought out the nickel-plated pocket salivarium; but I'm sorry to say that there was no show for it. The Mother's Help was his biggest thing."

"The Mother's Help?" said the historian.

"It's pretty popular with us, especially with fathers," said Miss Larkspur. "It's a cast-iron frame—cast-iron's strong enough for the average babe, but Number 2 in the store bill is of chilled steel for the livelier. It's not on record that any infant got free from the chilled steel Mother's Help. It's a beautiful piece of mechanism. You simply put the child into the frame at night, turn down the hood, wind up the machine, and go to bed, where you enjoy the balmiest repose until the morning, instead of being awaked half a dozen times or more, according to the ever-varying mood of the offspring in charge."

"Does it work by moral persuasion—I understand that moral persuasion is the great national force in the States?" said Mr. Cosway.

"It does—up to a certain point," replied the lady. "The baby is put into the frame, and the hood is fastened down; you touch an ivory button on the outside and two beautifully made spiral springs, with a silk pad on the end of each, press down upon the infant's eyelids, preventing them from opening. Then should the infant become restless through the night, it's motion in the frame sets some gear in action, and it begins to rock like a cradle for five minutes at a turn. Should the little cherub unfold that rosebud which cold strangers call its mouth to sing its little midnight hymn, arranged for a high soprano, the rubber tube connected with a bottle of warm milk is put into action, and the nozzle is forced into the little treasure's mouth, and held there forcibly for some minutes—the exact time can be regulated by setting an indicator on a dial outside. These operations are *repeated twice* through the night; but should little totems *show any temper* or kick out with any degree of violence,

the action sets free a beautiful system of levers, all nickel-plated. One of them, with a soft-padded end—quilted silk a little extra—presses firmly down on the sweet little bits of coral which a callous world calls its lips; that's the preliminary. Then another set grasps the little blossom and reverses its position—gently but firmly—it's a machine, not a nurse—machines have no fits of temper—and at once a spring is touched that sets in action a dainty little lath of cane, rising and falling with perfect regularity for whatever time may be arranged the night before. In the morning the mother rises from her undisturbed slumber, unlocks the frame, and there is the little pearl, smiling as if the angels had been whispering to it all night."

"And have they?" asked the historian.

"I think it more than likely," said his daughter. "If ever an infant had need of the sympathy of something celestial it is the American infant in the charge of a Mother's Help of cast-iron."

"I don't know," said Mr. Cosway, musingly. "I think that cast-iron or steel——"

"Chilled steel," said Miss Larkspur.

"Ah; chilled steel—is an excellent material for the framework of an infant's nurse—natural or artificial. And you intend to exploit these inventions of your friend at Sardana-palus City, Miss Larkspur."

"Well, I think it best to begin with something smaller, sir. The time-saving tabloids will, I think, do well in Britain. I mean to introduce them."

"If they provide one with an extra hour or so a day, I would gladly negotiate with you for a supply," said Mr. Cosway.

"There is the breakfast tabloid, the dinner tabloid, the afternoon-tea tabloid, and the supper tabloid," said Miss Larkspur. "It's calculated—on the prospectus—that every man in the States spends a quarter of an hour over his breakfast, seven minutes over his dinner—that's a little too high for most Americans—and ten minutes over his supper. In Britain I understand the time spent—especially by the titled classes—over their meals is even longer than is mentioned in this computation."

"Well, that's my idea too," said Mr. Cosway.

"The longer the time the greater need for the tabloids," said Miss Larkspur. "Each tabloid contains all the ingre-

dients necessary for a healthy meal—breakfast, dinner, afternoon tea, or supper, as the case may be. Well, on this system a man can breakfast while he's shaving. He simply puts the tabloid into his mouth, and when it melts he has had his breakfast. The business man can dine in a minute and a half at his bureau while talking into his phonograph. He can take his afternoon-tea tabloid while going home on the El."

"I beg your pardon—on the El?" said Mr. Cosway.

"The El—the Elevated track, sir. What a roundabout way the British take to express themselves!"

"Yes; you see we haven't got the talking tabloid here," remarked Lily. "The tabloid that gives you a whole phrase in a monosyllable."

"Not but what it's needed," said Miss Larkspur. "We'll discover that yet in the States. Give us time."

"You've discovered it long ago," laughed the girl. "Then the time-saving tabloids will make dinners unnecessary?"

"My dear Missy, the introduction of the tabloid will sweep away every meal. A dinner-party will be unknown. A dining-parlour will be a thing of the past. But, best of all, the cook will be abolished. She's had her day. She'll be found crushed beneath one of Hoffinsein's Tabloids."

"You think they'll be popular in England?" asked Minna.

"Why shouldn't they be? Won't they save every man, woman, and child at least an hour a day—more, if you take the titled classes into account? Are you British chained to your dinner-tables?"

"Miss Larkspur," said Lily, "I think it my duty to tell you that your praiseworthy attempt to introduce the tabloid into English domestic life would bring about your assassination within a week. You don't seem to be aware that the dinner in England is the centre on which our social life revolves. If we want to show honour to a great poet—we don't often, but if we do, we give him a dinner. If a Cabinet Minister has a secret to reveal to the world, he reveals it over a table at which pineapples have taken the place of sirloins. What is it that causes a husband to come home to his family after a hard day's work? Why, the dinner. Miss Larkspur, no anarchist with bombs sticking out of every pocket is half as great an enemy to society as you with the time saving tabloids in your hand-bag."

"You've got the bulge on me there, I own," said Miss Larkspur, after a pause. "Well, if the tabloid won't catch on, what do you say to Hoffinsein's Automatic Hostess?"

"I don't know what I'd say to her. I've never spoken to her. Automatic Hostess? It sounds enticing," said Lily.

"It's the very thing for Britain," said Miss Larkspur. "The figure is calculated to relieve ladies who see a good deal of company of all worry. It's a lovely piece of mechanism. Made in all sizes to suit hostesses. Its face is painted by a first-class artist in the fixed smile of the hostess receiving her guests—I rec we all know that smile."

"I must confess that I've seen it more than once," said Minna.

"I believe it's well known in Britain," said Miss Larkspur. "Well, the figure is beautifully dressed and fixed at the head of the stairs when the guests are arriving. A small Japanese mat is placed at a convenient distance in front of the figure, and the instant a guest steps upon this mat the electric circuit is completed; out goes the figure's right hand, the head makes a gentle inclination—as genteel as possible—and then the arm is drawn in again. Each guest is supposed to shake the hand, two seconds being allowed for the greeting, and then the next comes on the mat. In the case of the White House automaton it was regulated to do one cordial greeting every six-tenths of a second—say one hundred and ten a minute—that being about the White House average at receptions; but then the smile was painted extra broad. The model isn't ready for the English market yet. The inventor didn't know that the arm should be raised the height of the chin to be fashionable. It's only a matter of an extra lever, however, he says. It'll be ready for London by the middle of May."

"Now there," cried Lily, "Mr. Hoffinsein has hit upon something that is certain to make a fortune. Only he must remember that for the English market the greeting must have nothing of cordiality about it, and a broad look must be present at the same time as the smile. The figure must not be animated."

"I should say that if the automaton is allowed to use its own discretion on that point it will do very well," said Minna. "Yes, the more automaton-like it is the more closely it will resemble the hostess."

"There's a special one made for the wives of Senators and Congressmen in election years; double-action, hearty-pressure, triple-expansion smile, can be made to kiss hand gracefully by switching on another current," said Miss Larkspur.

"That would do admirably for England for the wives of under-Secretaries when the Government is shaky," remarked Lily. "Someone told me that if a Government is getting unpopular, the wives of the under-Secretaries are supposed to increase the breadth of their smiles."

"And it is to exploit these singularly thoughtful inventions you have come to England, Miss Larkspur?" said Mr. Cosway.

"Just to run off these few trifles, to make a man of our Willie, and——"

Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur paused and looked across the table at Minna.

"And——" said Lily. "What's the third business?"

"Well, to look at Miss Talbot straight in the face," said Miss Larkspur, in a rather different tone.

"That I should say must be by far the most pleasing of your duties, Miss Larkspur," said Mr. Cosway.

"That's so," said Miss Larkspur, slowly and with a suggestion of sadness in her voice. "That's so. I wanted to see a type of the lovely British girl whom we all worship in the States, and I think I might gun around a bit before I'd get anything nearer the mark than Miss Talbot."

"Now, that's quite charming!" cried Lily. "And yet some people say that American ladies can see no beauty in English girls."

"They're wrong there," said Miss Larkspur.

"You are exceptionally generous, Miss Larkspur," said Minna. "But I hope you will pardon me if I say that the tone of your voice gives me an impression of sadness. Why should you be sad when you look at me, Miss Larkspur?"

"I'm sad because I'm set thinking, Miss Talbot," replied Miss Larkspur. "It's a pity, ain't it, that Silas H. Hoffinstein can't invent a machine to do the thinking for us?"

"Yes; when the thinking is sad. But why should it be sad?" asked Lily.

"Because one face suggests another, my dear," said Miss Larkspur. "Because there's no living face that doesn't suggest a dead one."

They were now standing together at a window looking

into the garden. Mr. Cosway had already gone into the garden.

There was a considerable pause before Minna took Miss Larkspur's hands in her own and kissed her on the cheek.

Miss Larkspur walked to the other end of the room, and again there was a silence.

It was broken by the sound of her voice saying—

“Well, I rec I've been foolin' around here long enough. I'll go and have a look at our Willie. Girls, God bless you both. The world that you're in can't be so very bad as some folks would make us believe.”

CHAPTER XXV.

ON SPINSTERHOOD.

WHEN Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur had left the Cottage, the two girls became very thoughtful. They talked about Miss Larkspur. Of all middle-aged spinsters this American example was the best, they agreed. In the United States the women, being thoroughly practical, had cultivated the art of spinsterhood in their youth, until they wore it gracefully as a Spanish woman wears her lace mantilla. They agreed that it was absolutely necessary for one to study the art of spinsterhood early in life; it was like the acquirement of a foreign language: the earlier that a girl set about the study the better chance she would have of attaining an honourable proficiency in it when the time came for her to be able to practise it for a livelihood.

It was, curiously enough, Lily Cosway who started that theory, and urged it upon Minna with great seriousness; and Minna was somewhat amused at this, remembering, as she did, that only a month had passed since Lily had assured her, on their return from the last of the University Extension Lectures, that the great mistake of woman's education in England was to be found in the fact that the girl was trained up with a view to spinsterhood, not with the view to matrimony. Women were taught the art of being independ-

dent of men, while they should have been qualifying themselves in the science of ensnaring men—"as the trapper snares the beaver," were the exact words that she had employed in stating her views and her intentions at that time. And yet now she sat on the garden seat, pensively examining her little shoes that looked out from the embroidered skirt of her frock, and talking seriously of the graces of spinsterhood.

What had occurred to bring about this change, Minna wondered.

It could scarcely be the arrival of Miss Larkspur, for Miss Larkspur represented a type from which Lily must know the average English girl turned away with aversion. The genius of the English girl is averse to blue veils and spectacles, Minna knew, and she could not doubt that this knowledge was at the command of Lily also.

Minna waited. She was well aware of the system of frankness inculcated upon Lily by her father, and she had an idea that Lily would surely reveal what was on her mind if only time were given her.

"One of the graces of spinsterhood is scarcely the kissing of cowboys," hazarded Minna, after she had listened to her friend's long discourse on the subject of the necessity for an early training in that art of which Miss Larkspur was so eminent an exponent. "How to be Interesting though Unmarried" might have been the title of the girls' discourse.

"It was very horrid of me to say that about the cowboys," said Lily, with a little flush. "That is the worst of having a father who insists on my blurting out exactly what I feel. It's very difficult for me now to conceal anything that's on my mind."

"Or heart, my Lilyflower," said Minna. "But you needn't worry yourself. Miss Larkspur and I understood exactly what you meant when you said that—that about the cowboy."

"But it was vulgar—it was horrid!" said Lily, shaking her head dolefully.

"It might have sounded a trifle *bête* had it come from anyone but you," said Minna. "But I give you my word, it only sounded pretty coming from you."

"And the worst of it is that I felt it—I feel it now, whatever I may say about the divine right of spinsters," cried

Lily. "And yet you know that it was not a cowboy who was in my thoughts—my heart—a month ago—oh, a fortnight ago."

"Do I?" said Minna.

"Of course you do. I told you all there was to tell anyone. I told you that it would be quite out of the question for me to care a straw for any man but that one."

"Oh, the one who told you the tiger stories?"

"Ah, don't mock me, Minna. You don't know what it is to be overwhelmed with—with one's feeling."

"Overwhelmed? No. I am able to take a hearty lunch still. I suppose that proves your point."

"Tell me—tell me, Minna, what made him go off to London, a few days after he had told us that he meant to remain at the Court? He is not a cowboy."

"He certainly is not. But how could I possibly tell you why he went away to London? He did not confide in me, I can assure you. It was his original intention to go to London for the season, and then all at once he seemed to make up his mind that those—those business books of his compelled him to remain at the Court."

"That was only an excuse—anyone could see that he only made the estate books an excuse."

"So it would appear, for he carried out his original intention, you see."

"And I was idiotic enough to fancy that he had made up his mind to stay because he had seen me! I'm afraid that we don't understand men, my dear Minna."

"Great heavens! how can we expect to understand them when we don't understand ourselves?"

Minna had risen. There was a light in her face that Lily had never before seen in it. One of her hands was clinched, her lips had a quiver after she had spoken.

"You don't know yourself," she cried, "and I admit that I don't know myself; and yet each of us has a vain thought of knowing what men are—how they think—how they feel—the motives that sway them. Lily, Lily, Lily, I tell you that just now I feel as you do—as you said you felt: I feel that I'd like to turn away from every thought of every man of a highly developed and complex character—a man who is swayed by motives—feelings—imaginings—that no one can comprehend—not even himself—I say that I'd like to turn away from this man—no, he's not a man, but a piece of sen-

sitized paper—taking his tone from every breath that blows whither it listeth—to turn from him and throw myself into the arms of a cowboy. He at least knows himself and we know him.”

“Oh, heavens!” cried Lily. “Oh, heavens! And Miss Larkspur suggested a few days ago that you were a saint! After all, you are no stronger than I am.”

“Oh, we’re all the same,” said Minna. “We’re all women, and nothing they can do to us at school can prevent our being women. Good-bye. Whenever you are conscious of any feeling—I don’t care what it is—about men, you may be perfectly certain that the same feeling has come, or will come to me at some time of my life, if I am not experiencing it at the same instant as yourself. Our nature is like the God of the Hebrews: terrible—full of tenderness—a consuming fire.”

“Good-bye,” said Lily.

Her face was very full of seriousness as she laid it against the warm face of her friend at the wooden gate.

Minna kissed her and walked quickly along the road for half a dozen yards. Then she stopped suddenly, turned round with a laugh, ran back and kissed the serious face of the girl a dozen times, not passionately but playfully.

And not a word passed between them.

Minna walked along the road and Lily watched her pensively, her arm resting on the top of the gate.

She was but vaguely conscious of what was Minna’s thought when she spoke in that vehement way—a way that seemed quite alien to her character.

“Oh, heavens! is it possible that I know nothing whatever about a woman’s nature or a man’s nature?” she cried. “Every day brings new surprises to me: surprises about myself, about the people whom I am beginning to observe, about Minna whom I fancied I knew thoroughly. Are we all pagans without knowing it. Have we all suddenly begun to think more of the body than the soul? Is it possible that all our teaching has done for us is to make us love as men love—not for the soul? A cowboy! . . . And she spoke what she felt—she was as sincere as I was. A cowboy! . . . Oh, we are all pagans.”

She continued leaning over the gate—not lost in thought—her mind had been too carefully trained for that: it had a *spine*, and its *spine* had been as carefully looked after as her

own vertebræ, first by preceptresses, then by preceptors—not lost in thought, but simply pursuing a line of thinking that led her into a wilderness.

(A wilderness may be the ultimate goal of a trained mind as well as of an uneducated one.)

But just as she was about to return to the Cottage she looked once more up the road. Minna was still in sight. But in another moment she would disappear where the road made a curve. She did not, however, disappear at once; for from the grassy bank that sloped upward from the hedge at the roadside to the green meadow above there arose a figure—the figure of a man, and, leaping the hedge, stood before her in the road, taking off his straw hat.

Lily saw Minna shake hands with him—did she allow him to hold her hand a second or two longer than was necessary?—and there they stood talking for some time face to face. Then they walked on together, side by side, Minna looking up to him as they talked.

They disappeared round the curve, and Lily, as she returned to the garden seat, was conscious of a curious little stinging pain somewhere—was it in her heart?

What had Willie Passmore got to say to Minna that he should have waited for her at the side of the road, for perhaps an hour?

That was the question which gave her that little stab of pain, the exact *locale* of which she could not at once determine. What business had he to be walking away with Minna? What was he saying to her that seemed to interest her so much as to cause her to raise her face, as she had done, in order to meet his eyes—for he looked down into her face every now and again? Had those two who were walking together on that road so much in common that a confidential chat like that in which they were indulging was absolutely necessary?

That curious uneasiness of which she became conscious—it followed the sharp pain that she had felt—was a mystery to her. Great heavens! Could she not see two people of her acquaintance strolling along a country road without being consumed with curiosity to overhear the phrases that were passing between them?

Had he waited for her?

That was a question which had to be answered. Had he waited for her, and wherefore? What on earth could he

want to say to her that necessitated an exercise of patience on his part?

Had she told him to wait for her at that part of the road? She did not appear to be at all startled at his sudden appearance in front of her—no; she had shaken hands with him quite naturally and . . . had she allowed him to hold her hand longer than he need have held it?

Whither did all these questions tend? Why was she so absurdly interested in the ordinary movements of those two persons?

She started up.

Was it possible that Minna Talbot was in love with Willie Passmore?

That was the question which came upon Lily when she was sitting with her eyes fixed abstractedly upon the rose-bed in front of her, causing her to spring to her feet with a suddenness that was startling even to herself.

What were all the subsidiary questions compared with this one?

She felt that she was on the eve of a great discovery; and she was right. She felt that a great revelation was about to be made to her; and her feeling did not deceive her.

Every word uttered by Minna—every tone—and every expression of her face—that sudden outburst which had puzzled her—all came back to Lily in that moment. All were intelligible to her on the assumption suggested to her by that question:

“Was it possible that Minna Talbot was in love with Willie Passmore?”

The laugh that she gave when she found herself actually repeating out loud the words in which that question had been suggested to her—repeating the words over and over as though they had something of the power of an incantation—and they had—had a note of shrillness in it; a much stronger note than that which had rung through her long laugh on hearing of Willie's escapade and its consequences.

She gave that laugh and then she found herself interlacing her fingers, her teeth being set. She did not know what a gleam there was in her eyes—a gleam that had never been in them since she was born.

“What on earth is it to me if he should be in love with her—if she should be in love with him—if they should love each other ten times over?” she cried, actually out loud,

once again. "Let them love away—walking on the road—in the garden—under the emerald leafy ways of the countryside—hand in hand—face looking into face—lips clinging to lips—yes, after the manner of the lovers whose movements are chronicled for the entertainment of silly girls. She talked about a cowboy—well, how many degrees removed from a cowboy is he—he—the man who was sent down twice from the University—the man who makes a futile attempt to paint the town crimson, as the cowboys phrase it, and who gets locked up by a single policeman, not wearing a picturesque sombrero, or riding boots, but wearing a helmet and regulation gaiters and with a number in brass figures on his stock? Let her have her travesty of a cowboy!"

Again she laughed shrilly. A long silence followed. She was leaning gradually forward, a hand grasping an arm of the garden chair on each side. The light that had been in her eyes became stronger as her eyes widened in eagerness.

"My God!" she whispered. "My God! it is I who love him and that feeling was jealousy of her!"

The revelation had been made to her: Miss Cosway, B.A., Brooke's Scholar, listed equal to third Wrangler, was in love with the youth whom she had described—not without reason—as a poor travesty of a cowboy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON WAITING.

"I'VE been waiting there for you for the last hour and a half fully," said Willie, when Minna had shaken hands with him and congratulated him upon his capacity for taking hedges at a bound, without injuring either the hedges or himself. "I knew, of course, that you were lunching with her—Aunt Immy—she's not my aunt, you know—told me she was going there to meet you."

"And I like your aunt, who isn't your aunt, greatly," said Minna. "Yes, isn't it a pity that some of her shrewd-

ness and knowledge of the world can't be transferred to your other guardian?"

"Isn't it just?" said Willie. "Ah, I suppose it is as it is on the principle I heard laid down as a doctrine on one of the few days that I found myself in chapel: the little vexations and troubles of life, said the preacher, are given to us for fear we should get too well satisfied with the world and cease to yearn for the wings of a dove, et cetera, et cetera. There's no danger of my becoming too satisfied with the world that contains my Uncle William in my immediate neighbourhood."

"Miss Larkspur says she'll make a man of you, Willie" — Minna had continued calling him by his first name ever since they had had those few words on the road leading to the village.

"I wish she'd hurry about it," said he. "Will she succeed, should you say, speaking as an unprejudiced observer, Miss Talbot?"

"I do believe that she will," said Minna. "Did you lie in wait for me solely to discuss the prospects of your incipient manhood?"

"I'll not keep you," said he. "But as you said that you wouldn't be ashamed to be seen walking with me, I'll open my heart to you as we go along. I don't suppose Sir George will return for another hour."

"It would be quite unlikely," said she. "I'm in no hurry to get home; and though I don't suppose that a heart can be opened even by an expert as rapidly as another expert can open an oyster, I dare say you'll have time to carry out your promise before I reach the lodge gates."

They walked on together, all unconscious of the fact that over that wooden gate through which Minna had recently come an eager face was following their very ordinary movements so long as the curve of the road admitted of their being seen.

"It'll not take me long," said he. "No, not when I once get under way. Of course, you know that I'm pretty deep in love with your friend Lily Cosway."

"I do; but why 'of course'?" asked Minna.

"Because I'm such a shallow sort of chap anyone with eyes can see through me," said he. "Yes; I saw that you *saw that I saw that you knew it*—yes, from the very first—*that night in your drawing-room.*"

"Yes; I do think that I saw that you saw—I hope you'll excuse my going through all the saws; it's like the funny rhyme about 'I saw Esau.'"

"It is—just like that, when you come to put it in words, but it's a rather serious business for me, I can tell you, Miss Talbot."

"I don't doubt it. You think that when you've confessed it to me you've got it off your mind and it will trouble you no more?"

"Well, I admit that I feel a deal easier now that I've told you, though I've only told you what I know you know already—what I know you know I——"

"Oh, please, no more reduplications—I've a poor head."

"I know that you're the best girl that ever lived in the world, and that there's no other one like you. I want you to tell me what chance I have—if any. Don't mind telling me the truth. I wouldn't force you into such a corner if I wasn't strong enough to bear the worst."

"The truth isn't necessarily always the worst. Chance—chance of what?"

"Chance of getting her to care about me—to take me seriously—as if I really was in earnest—I am in earnest—deadly earnest, you know."

"I believe seriously that you are. You are twenty-two years of age."

"And three-quarters."

"Then you are just one year older than Lily."

"I know that: I sent for one of the papers that gave her portrait—what they had the impudence to call her portrait. It's about as like her as—but that doesn't matter. The biographical sketch gave the date of her birth—more of their impudence!"

"But I believe that, through a clause in your father's will, you are not to be a free agent until you are twenty-five—three years hence."

"Two and a quarter. That brings us to the point: have I the right to go to her and tell her that there's no one in the world that I could possibly love except herself, when I should have to tell her in the next breath that I'd have to wait for two years and three months before offering to marry her? Have I the right to ask her to waste two years and, say, two months—she might marry someone else in a month from now—of her life?"

"Waste—waste? Does waiting mean wasting one's time, do you fancy, my dear Willie? I'd be sorry to think that it does. Have you ever thought that the lives of most girls are made up of nothing but waiting?"

"I'm sorry to say that I never gave so much thought to girls as I should have. To tell you the truth, I didn't think them worth thinking about, you see. I'd no idea that you were in the world—that Lily was in the world."

"Waiting is as natural a part of a girl's life—a woman's life as working is part of a man's life. What does it matter how deeply we love: we must wait in silence. Waiting, hoping, longing, despairing; there is the life to which most women are doomed. Listen to me, Willie. Your Lilyflower seems to you amazingly clever, does she not?"

"Clever—rather! What an ass I seem beside her—an unlicked cub—a country lout! Oh, I've no chance of her. If I'd ever had the luck of Clifford who stopped your horses I might have faced her; but I hadn't; I was only in the position of the Johnnie that gave him his chance. I've no chance of her. Good-bye."

"Wait. You think her so clever. You never were farther mistaken in your life. She's the sweetest, the best, and the loveliest girl that the world contains, but she's not cleverer than the baby whose eyes have just opened in the world, and who sees without the capacity to understand what the things around it mean. Our beloved knows nothing whatever about men. I saw that you were in love with her that first evening that you called at the Tower—that made me like you."

"God bless you!"

"And I also saw that she liked you."

"No, no; that's impossible. You're too generous."

"Generosity doesn't increase one's capacity to perceive things. She liked you, and that liking has been growing ever since, though she hasn't the least suspicion of it herself, and though she fancies that she cares about someone else, and that that someone else cares about her—yes, although she can't quite understand his running away to London, after he had promised her—he certainly looked at her when he made his promise—to stay in her neighbourhood."

"Good Lord! Clifford! You mean to say that she cares about Clifford?"

"I mean to say nothing of the sort. I tell you she is like

a child who cannot understand the simplest thing that it sees. God knows that we don't understand much at the best, but our Lily . . . oh, she cares nothing for Oswald Clifford; but when she fancies she does, the effect may be the same so far as you are concerned. You need not run up against that brick wall of her fancy, hoping to burst it down with the force of your impact."

"But perhaps she does really care about him. If I thought that she did, and that he had the least feeling—the sort of feeling that might eventually broaden into the real thing—I'll be hanged if I wouldn't clear off to-morrow and take to ranching. I expect that I'd have a better chance of forgetting her on a ranch than anywhere else. What a brute I'd be if I'd stand in his way."

"I don't see that. Generosity should have its limits. Who are you to say that Oswald Clifford is a better man than yourself?"

"What? Why, look at him."

"We can't look at him: he ran away, and that too after he had promised to remain. You at least are here. Don't you run away to a ranch. Stay here and wait. Wait until she awakens and everything appears clear to her. I'm not afraid of the result, and I have her future at heart as much as you have."

"I'll wait—oh, Lord, wouldn't I wait for a century for her?"

"I don't believe at this moment that you'll be required to wait for so long. Oh, no, I thought just now that I saw signs of her awaking."

"But her dad—that learned Johnnie who writes the books—wouldn't he just show me the door if I were to go up to him to tell him that I had the impudence to love his daughter?"

"Not he. Don't let any one suggest such a contingency to you. He's the broadest-minded man in the world, though he is an historian. I don't say that he treats his daughter properly."

"Good Lord!" Willie had stopped suddenly in the road and had clinched his hands. "Good Lord! he ill-treats her! If I thought that, if he were her father ten times over, I'd—"

"Don't be a goose!" said Minna, laughing. "There's no such thing as being the father of one girl ten times over."

AS FOR DANIEL AND
EDWIN

THE END

Once is the utmost limit, and it's generally quite enough for the peace of mind of the father. I only mean that he doesn't treat her as a mother would treat her."

"Oh. But then you must remember he's only a father. How does he treat her?"

"He looks on her as the working model of a woman. He insists on her being perfectly natural and frank in order that he may have some further light thrown upon the character and the goings on of the women of the Second Century of whom he writes."

"But he doesn't fancy that she goes on as they did?"

"I think he fancies that in all ages there has been a good deal of womanliness about women. He says he has learned much from a careful observation of his daughter, and I've no doubt that he speaks the truth. But it isn't to instruct fathers how to write history that girls were sent into the world; and when a girl is forced by her father to be frank and natural in early life it takes her a long time to break herself of these habits: sometimes she doesn't succeed in doing so at all. Lily hasn't, at any rate. That's all due to her father; but at the same time you may take my word for it that he is sufficiently broad-minded to smile at your—your adventures at the University and elsewhere if you tell him that you love his daughter."

What Minna had in her mind was that the historian was sufficiently broad-minded to be able to perceive from the standpoint of a man of the world—historians of an epoch are sometimes men of the world—how advantageous it would be to his daughter to be married to a man with a quarter of a million of pounds, excellently invested, together with sundry accumulations of money and property to the extent—according to the estimate of Sir George Anderson—of fifty or sixty thousand more. She did not undervalue the services of Mr. Cosway to English literature in arriving at this conclusion. He was greater than any historian in England, or, perhaps, in America as well, but it was quite understood among the publishing fraternity in both countries that he was what is known as "an excellent business man."

(An excellent business man is the style in which business men allude to some one who habitually succeeds in minimizing their share of the profits resulting from trading with him.)

"You don't think that he'll tell me to 'get,' as Aunt Immy would say?" enquired Willie.

"I'm perfectly sure that he won't—when the time is ripe for an interview with him," replied Minna. "But the time is not yet ripe."

"He won't mind the stain of the night in the police cells?"

"I said before that he was a great historian."

"And they don't, as a class, attach undue importance to a few hours in the early morning spent on a plank bed?"

"They are cordial in their reception of all criminals. If it wasn't for criminality the work of an historian would be insipid. History without criminality would be as tasteless as a salad without vinegar. Good-bye. My last word to you is, 'Wait.'"

He took her hand.

"It is the best advice that was ever given to a man," said he.

"Or a woman," said she.

"Why should there be any sadness in your laugh," he enquired—she had given a little laugh; but she could not fancy his detecting the note of sadness she found (to her surprise) pervaded it.

"Good-bye," said she.

They had walked on a considerable distance past the lodge gates of the Tower, and here they parted. He would have returned with her to the entrance but that he was fully aware of the fact that Sir George was not so liberally-minded as Minna had just said Mr. Cosway was; his estimate of the effects of a night spent in a police cell was somewhat severe, as was only to be expected the estimate of a perpetual ex-Mayor of such a town as Weighborough would be. Mr. Cosway had never been, and indeed it was almost hopeless to expect that he ever should be, Mayor of Weighborough, and therefore qualified for the more distinguished post (according to the general acceptance of Sir George's views) of ex-Mayor.

Willie therefore thought it better not to run the risk of meeting Sir George face to face while he was walking with Minna. So he allowed her to return alone.

She felt that she had given him the best advice that was in her power to offer to him. She liked him very much, possibly because he was so very unlike most men whom she had a chance of meeting—men with wealthy fathers who had made Weighborough what it was. That was how they

summed up their services to their native town; and Minna accepted the phrase as strictly accurate. It was these men who had made Weighborough what it was—namely, heavy, vulgar, pretentious, bigoted, hypocritical. Willie she knew to be honest, to have feeling, sympathy, affection, and, best of all, love for Lily, the girl whom she loved with all her heart.

She had given him the best advice possible when she had said that one word "wait." It was the advice which was nearest to her own heart, for that one word "wait" she had been whispering to herself daily—hourly—when her heart was filled with longing for the love that was still afar, though the swallows had come back from the South in response to the yearning of the Spring-time and were now wheeling about the exquisite filmy dusk that was gathering above the trees.

The blackbirds and the thrushes were encompassing the world with their music, and the heart of their songs beat with the triumph of love. Love had come down to the world and the world was shouting with joy. There was no voice of this live nature around her that said "Wait." There was nothing to wait for: all had come.

"How long? How long? How long?"

That was the cry of her heart.

And then she stood still at the roadside, for she saw that he was coming to her—he—he himself—Oswald Clifford. She saw his face—she saw the light in his eyes; and then she knew that all was over—all her waiting—all her passionate yearning—all her crying of that prayer of the despairing:

"How long? How long? How long?"

"I saw you walking with our friend Willie," said he, "and I made up my mind that I would wait for you."

"You—waiting?" she said, and laughed.

It seemed the most perfectly humorous incident—his waiting—the idea of his waiting!

"You waiting?" she said again. "What can you possibly know about waiting?"

"I know that I have waited all my life for you," said he.

He did not take a step nearer to her while he spoke or after he had spoken. He stood before her with his face alight with love.

Then there was a silence, except for the blackbirds above the sweet-smelling hedges.

"I have waited all my life for you," he said again; and then he took the step nearer to her—suddenly, but she was not startled; she did not move an inch back from him. She was looking into his face—it was not far off. "All my life—all my life," he repeated. "When I first saw you on this road a month ago—is it only a month ago?—I had a dream that my years of waiting and wandering were over. I did my best, I give you my word, to continue my life without you, for I knew that if indeed my feeling for you was true I would not be able to resist it. I made up my mind, as I told you, to stay at home; I did so in order to be near you. Then suddenly I determined to put my heart to the test: I went to London—for a fortnight I have been living in the heart of that whirlwind known as London. The test is over. I am here."

"Yes, you are here," she said.

"For God's sake give me a word—one word," he whispered.

"One word? I will give you more—more," she said, her voice tremulous with passion. It was as though her heart were beating in her lips as she spoke. "More—more. I know how comfortless is one word only—I have tried to comfort myself every day—every hour by that word 'Wait—wait.'"

"My beloved!"

"My beloved! my beloved! All the days of waiting are over for us."

He caught both her hands in his own and held them to him.

"What can I say to you?" he asked. "What are the words that I may offer you?"

"Oh, words!" she cried, with contempt in her voice. "Words! words! I told you what poor comfort I found in words. Don't leave go my hands, or I will think that this is a dream—a dream that comes to reveal to me the meaning of the summer that takes the spring into its arms—the meaning of the music of the spring when the summer has clasped it."

"I shall never let you go," he said. "Never—never! I bind you to me for ever."

His hands tightened over her own—she felt them. His face was close to hers, but—the roadside.

He unloosed her hands suddenly, but she could not think

that he was saying "good-bye." He caught her hands again, whispering—

"My beloved—my beloved for ever!"

Then she was alone on the roadside along which a couple of wagons were lumbering.

She turned and walked up the carriage drive toward the Tower. She had gone more than half-way along the drive when she paused with her eyes fixed upon a faint star that was struggling through the early dusk. Was that the Evening Star, she wondered. Surely it was the lover's star though it was still shining so faintly.

"Shine—shine—shine—star of Love!" she whispered.

In a moment his arms were about her and he was covering her face with kisses.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON DUTY.

THE revelation which had been made to Lily Cosway on that same evening overwhelmed her. All the next day she remained indoors, pretending to read the books which had been sent to her on that lovely day when she had remained in her garden listening to the joy of the spring beneath the rapturous kiss of the summer. The books were poor stuff, she thought; and so they were: for what is the description of a passion alongside the passion itself?

She was in the position of a man on the frosty Caucasus, who declares that an account of a fire is a very poor thing, since he remains chilly after reading it.

She was dazed with the suddenness of that revelation which had been made to her in a moment. All the night she had lain awake trying by mockery to discredit the truth of that revelation. (She had no heart to recall the passages in ancient literature which dealt with the vain attempts made in the same direction by some erring women to whom unsavoury revelations had been made by persons who claimed to be exempted from the penalties attached to communications of this type.)

How could it be possible, she asked herself, that she was jealous of Minna—jealous of Minna in respect of Willie

Passmore? How could it be possible that she loved Willie Passmore? Had she not called him a provincial lout?—a blundering fool, who had not sufficient originality to set about burning his books for himself, but was only struck with the idea when he had seen her set her books on fire?—a travesty of a cowboy? How could she be in love with such a person? She thought of the chuckle and guffaw, which she had once said were his most prominent characteristics. In love with him! The idea was ridiculous.

And then having proved to herself—to her own mind (she actually appointed her mind arbiter) that it was quite impossible that she could love Willie Passmore, she cried—

“Come to me—come to me, my beloved!”

It was of Willie Passmore she was thinking.

But he did not come.

“What is on your mind, my dear?” her father enquired, when he found her almost boisterously merry at dinner.

“What is on your mind?”

“On my mind? Oh, I have long ago squeezed my mind as one squeezes a sponge,” she replied, with a loud laugh, that caused her father to become very solemn. “There may be a little dampness still on my mind—a line or two from a Greek poet—a formula or two from a book of mathematics: that’s all there’s on my mind.”

“Ah.”

There was a considerable pause before she said—

“It is my heart that is troubling me.”

“That is the penalty you must pay for having squeezed your mind. Perhaps you have been trying to wipe something off your heart with that damp sponge you talked about.”

“Oh, don’t fancy that it is on my own account I have worried myself into the fit of gaiety that so depressed you, my dearest father,” said she. “It is solely on her account.”

“Her account?—Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur’s account?”

“Heavens! On Minna Talbot’s account. For whom on earth except Minna would I worry myself into a fit of gaiety?”

“Ah, for whom indeed? But why drag in Minna at all?” asked her father.

“I’m afraid that I’m beginning to look on the matter as a question of duty,” said Lily.

"Oh, duty?" said her father. "We should always do our duty, no matter how we hurt the feelings—of others."

"And yet I'm not sure that I can do anything in this particular case," said she, thoughtfully. "After all, what business is it of mine if she should make up her mind to be a fool?"

"When a girl refers to the likelihood of her friend's being a fool, she simply means that her friend has the likelihood of being loved by a man. Who is the man?" asked the historian.

"Willie Passmore," she replied. "Now you know the worst."

"Yes; only she calls it the best—if it is true."

"True?—if it is true? Why, he waited for her on the road last evening after she left me, and he held her hand—yes, much longer than he need have held it, and she looked up to his face, and he looked down into hers—he is very tall, you know, and really not so slender as to force people to call him a water-flag or a lightning-conductor."

"And then?"

"Then? Oh, then they went round a turn in the road so that I couldn't see them. But there's no doubt about the gravity of the situation: Minna, when in the garden with me, talked about the nature of woman. Now you know as well as I do that no woman talks about the nature of woman unless the situation is a serious one."

"I'm willing to sit at your feet in such matters, sweetest one."

"And then she talked about the difficulty of understanding oneself."

"The comparative degree of gravity."

"And then of the difficulty of understanding men."

"Is that the superlative degree?"

"No; the superlative is the cowboy: when a woman talks seriously about a cowboy, you may depend upon it that a crisis is at hand."

"And yet you introduced the cowboy at lunch yesterday."

"And that meant that this crisis—this—was at hand. It is reached now; for I see Minna—my best friend—about to be a fool, and I can't make up my mind to go to her and *implore of her to refrain.*"

"And that means a crisis? I have learned much from

you, my dear, and I hope to learn much more; but what am I to say respecting the gravity of the condition of a young woman who supposes—to be exact, who tries to make someone else believe that she supposes—that anyone in the world ever refrained from being a fool because of the warning of a friend?"

"But I feel that I should never forgive myself if I allowed Minna——"

"To be a fool? Oh, yes, my dear; we forgive ourselves for the follies which others commit. We also forgive them for committing those follies; but we never forgive the friend who tries to induce us to refrain from a course that leads to folly."

"Then I must simply stand by and see her——"

"My dearest child, it is not cynicism but observation which compels me to assure you that, from the foundation of the world through all ages and in all climes, no satisfaction has ever been allowed to a man that is equal to the satisfaction of seeing his friend make a fool of himself. The headshake, with half-closed eyes, of the professional moralist on being made aware—nay, on having a suspicion, of the folly of a friend, represents a measure of happiness that has no parallel. Of course, for complete happiness, we must not be injured by the folly of the fool—he must not have borrowed the money, or she—assuming the opposite sex—must not have borrowed the lover from us. In such a case we are grieved by the act of folly, and wish that we had been clever enough to keep our money or our lover. You must not forget that it is in heaven there is joy over one sinner that repenteth. It certainly is not on earth. Christ knew men a little too well to suggest that."

"Do you mean to say that I would be glad to see Minna marry Willie Passmore?"

She had risen from the table and had assumed the pose of the woman who is indignant at being accused of a folly of which she is innocent—a folly which she regrets she has not had a chance of committing.

"No, no," said her father. "You love one of the two persons who would be most affected by that transaction, and that love saves you from the chance of ever being so accused."

She could not help feeling that her father was very trying; he chose his words so well. Every man who chooses

his words is trying ; one never knows exactly what he means. That is how so many orators have from time to time been assassinated.

"I know that I love Minna," said Lily, steadfastly, as a simple person speaking against a word-artist ; "and I know that if she fancies she loves Willie Passmore she is deceiving herself, and misery is certain to follow."

"I would advise you, if I might venture to place my experience in antagonism to your instinct, my dear," said Mr. Cosway, "to recall the instances in which your friend, Minna, has showed a disposition to behave rashly, before you finally make up your mind what course you should adopt with a view of averting the misery which you believe to be impending."

"What," cried Lily, "don't you know that however discreetly—however wisely a woman may behave in regard to the ordinary affairs of life, there is no guarantee that in the supreme matter of love and marriage she may not make the greatest fool of herself."

Her father looked up.

"When you have made such a discovery as that for yourself without assistance, you have shown yourself capable of judging—also without assistance—what course should be adopted under the most trying circumstances," said he.

"I may be able to save her yet," said the girl, with a hopefulness in her tone that fully suggested to her father the despair which was in her heart.

But the next day came without seeing her on her way to pay that visit of warning to her friend Minna.

What she did on the next day was to set out on a long walk to visit a lady who lived four miles away—not that she was consumed with any desire to visit the lady, but simply because she thought it likely that Minna would call to see her, and she was afraid that she might be led to do that duty, the terms of which she had stated so clearly to her father, the duty of warning Minna of the misery that could scarcely fail to result from her persisting in her infatuation for Willie Passmore.

(And it was Lily who had a short time before been referring to the career of Jonah, a prophet.)

The road that she took passed through the village of *Ashdown* with its three picturesque public houses—each *vying with the other* in respect of its picturesque elements,

and claiming to be the genuine old coach road inn, and thereby appealing to the well-defined antiquarian sympathies of the *bonâ fide* travellers who came away every Sunday from the smoke and grime of Weighborough to spend a few hours in the country, and who spent those hours in the back parlour of a public house. After leaving Ashdown the road trended to the east in the direction of the coastland village of Whiterocks. The house where she meant to pay her visit stood off this road, about three miles from Ashdown.

There was never a large amount of traffic here, but tramps were practically unknown, for the Weighborough people, who had built their villas in the neighbourhood, were determined that it should be what they—some of them were auctioneers—called “select.” This day Lily had not gone more than a mile along the road when she met a man in the dress of a sailor—one who had clearly put on his Sunday togs to give a sort of religious aspect to a longshore spree. He was not so sober as to call for remark, but at the same time he was not very drunk—yet: the afternoon was still young. He carried himself with the air of an experienced optimist: he hoped much from the afternoon.

He showed more than the average adoration of the mercantile marine for the Sex by leaving the footpath a long way before meeting Lily, and walking as nearly as was practical in the middle of the road. He was a broad-smiling, free-rolling man, and the sight of him on a country road could not fail to give a certain alertness to enquiring minds among the wayfarers. It stimulated the imagination to the same extent as does the sudden appearance of an Oriental in the streets of London, or of an athlete in Weighborough.

To Lily, the sailor, with that whisper in his carriage of midday thirst copiously relieved, was undoubtedly interesting, and he perceived her interest on her face.

“May I make so bold, Missy,” he said, with a finger raised to his cap—he was still in the middle of the road, “as to axe if I’m right for Ashdown village?”

“Quite right,” she replied. “Only don’t turn to the left when you come to cross-roads.”

“I’m obligated, Miss,” said the man. Then he took a step nearer her, when she was about to walk on, and after a glance all round, he added in an undertone that suggested the confidential agent, “May I take the liberty of enquiring if the hotel accommodation is satisfactory at the village of.”

—of—now what might its name be? Perhaps you can tell me where I'm bound for, Miss, as you're so kind and lovely as a figure-head fresh sand-papered."

"Ashdown is the name of the village," said she. "There are three inns."

She walked on.

"Three inns?—three inns! Goblessa, Missy. You somehow put me in mind o' a sunrise breeze off the Brazils, that blows nose-gays"—the two words caused him some trouble—"to the anchor watch. Three inns! Goblessa!"

He had not stirred from the road when she had walked on; and for his consideration in that point she was grateful. She looked back and nodded to him a pretty farewell. She reflected that she would not have been so unnecessarily courteous but for the fact that he was a sailor, and that he had not taken that step toward her.

"There's not much that's stuck up about her," murmured the sailor as he went on short tacks along the road, luffing up when a wagon confronted him suddenly. Three inns! The thought was a stimulating one. The afternoon was not far spent. He felt all the glow of a soldier—an experienced soldier—going into action against a foeman worthy of his steel—assuming that the steel was English, not German. Three public houses!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON PROVIDENCE.

LILY continued her walk and paid her visit of half an hour. As she returned on the same road she felt more like Jonah than ever. She had been flying from the duty that had been laid upon her—the duty of receiving her friend and of (perhaps) hearing from her that she had found out how accurate was her original estimate of Willie Passmore, which was that he was a straightforward, manly fellow, worthy of the love of the best of girls.

She had fled from the humiliation of hearing Minna's confession; and her own repetition of the words "lout,"

"rowdy," "ignoramus," gave her very little comfort. He might have earned such names—he probably had earned them—but this circumstance did not prevent her from loving him, though she tried hourly to persuade herself that it was a lying prophet that had made the revelation to her after she had seen Minna walking down the road with Willie Passmore.

"Minna knew him—Minna knew him from the first," she moaned to herself. "That was because she had been living in the world while I was shut up in the cloister, poring over those wretched books that tell nothing that one wants to know about the world. I have lost all—all that is worth anything in the world, for the sake of being able to write two letters after my name—letters which I never shall write after my name. While other girls have been in the world of living people, I have been nothing beyond an illustration—a working model of a woman. I was used to illustrate the theories of the faddists, who hang around platforms talking about something they call the higher education of women—something that isn't education at all. And at home I have been used by my father as Darwin used the worms—as Lubbock used the ants. It is no matter what becomes of me afterwards: I have done my work in life."

This was the moan of her poor heart as she returned along the road toward Ashdown.

When she was still a couple of miles from the village, she was met by a young woman, neatly dressed; but perhaps just a trifle too bright about the hat. She was walking slowly and, apparently, aimlessly along the road. Lily had never seen her before, and she was startled when the woman spoke to her.

"You'll excuse me, Miss, I hope," said she, "but may I ask if you met a man going toward Whiterocks—a sailor-man, Miss?"

"I met a sailor on this road an hour and a half ago," said Lily. "He enquired if he was on the way to Ashdown."

"And he walked on to Ashdown?" said the woman.

"Of course I didn't wait to see: I was going in the contrary direction," said Lily. "But I took it for granted that he went on. He wished to know if there was an inn at Ashdown, so I took it for granted he meant to stay there for some time."

"And there is an inn at Ashdown, I'll be bound," said the woman.

"I told him that there were three," replied Lily.

"Three? Oh, Lord, an hour and a half ago, and three public houses! How will I ever get him back?"

Real distress was visible on the woman's face; and Lily would gladly have made the attempt to reply to her last question, only she found herself wanting in experience. She might have added in her list of grievances against the superintendents of her education that they had never taught her what course should be adopted by the wife of a sailor who had got an hour and a half's start of her in a range of three fully-equipped public houses. This was a problem that had to do with life. Upon its successful solution the happiness of hundreds—she knew so little of life that she thought only of hundreds—was dependent. They had taught her nothing about inebriation and its phases at school.

"Perhaps it may not be so bad as you fancy," said Lily, weakly.

"Oh, an hour and a half, and three public houses!" said the woman. "You don't know what he can do, Miss. And we started fair and easy from Whiterocks; but I didn't know that he'd a bottle stowed away in the slack of his jersey—that was why I had to leave him and go on to find Mr. Passmore's house alone. Well, well! I'm much obliged to you, Miss. That's what the Lord sent him safe back to me for, after eleven months—to give me a chance of looking after him."

"Of looking after whom?" asked Lily.

"My husband, Miss—the sailorman you met, and who is now—well, perhaps he never went out of the first of the three, though that would not be like him: he was always a just and impartial man, and he divides his custom fairly between all the public houses that comes in his way."

"I can show you the way to Ashdown," said Lily. "I suppose you intend to look after your husband."

"It would be very kindly of you, Miss; I'm a stranger here," said the woman.

They walked on toward the village—not quite side by side, for the stranger insisted on keeping one step behind Miss Cosway, but near enough to converse.

"You were at Mr. Passmore's house, I think you mentioned," said Lily.

"That was what we came here for," said the woman. "Yes; to thank him as was only his due."

"To thank him—Mr. Passmore?"

"We'd need, Miss. I believe I'd have took train to thank him if so be that it was at Newcastle I was living, and not so nigh and handy as Whiterocks."

"What had you to thank him for, Mrs.—you did not tell me your name."

"Williams, Miss; that's my name by marriage. What had I to thank him for? What—maybe you never heard tell of the *Sydney Packet*—four-masted steel ship of the Passmore Packet line."

"I never did, Mrs. Williams."

"The *Sydney Packet* was the ship, Job Williams was the boatswain. She started on the run to Frisco, as the sailors call it, with a general cargo in March last year, and was spoke off Lundy, and again off the Horn, in bad weather. That was the last that was heard of her for ten months; and she'd been re-insured at forty per cent. premium, Miss. Think of that."

Lily did think of it. It conveyed nothing intelligible to her. Her educators had concealed from her all acquaintance with the great business of charter parties and underwriting; they had taught her how to calculate eclipses, which was eminently useful to a young woman in her daily life in the world; and the periodic times of comets, which, as a branch of sound practical education, they considered indispensable.

"When she was four months overdue, we—the women folk of the ship's company—went as usual to the offices of the owners to draw the half-pay of our husbands. We were told that there was no pay for us. The Company had no mind to pay away money to the women-folk of the hands that had left their employ. *Had left their employ*—that was how they put it, Miss, to break it gently to us. I don't think there was many of us that felt the blow to be a gentle one. But a Company has no heart, Miss—no compassion. Some of us broke down. Starvation was ahead of us. But one woman—the wife of the carpenter—did us a good turn unbeknown to herself and to us. She had a notion that the Passmore Packets still belonged to Mr. Passmore—she didn't know that in place of one owner there was a thousand shareholders; and so she wrote a letter, telling the whole story,

and saying there was hope of the ship yet. She addressed it to Mr. Passmore, and marked it '*very private.*' It was sent on to Mr. Passmore's son, who was at college; and if he didn't write to every one of us to say that if the damned old Company—those were his own words, Miss, in black and white—if the damned old Company chose to go to hell that was their lookout—excuse the words, Miss—they were his, set down in black and white."

"Set down by God in letters of gold for all the angels in heaven to read," cried Lily, in a passion of fervour that was indifferent to the ring of rhapsody. Her face was pale, her eyes were streaming.

"God bless you, Miss! You know what a man is!" said the woman.

"No—no—no—I have acquired all knowledge in the world but that. This is my first lesson on what it is to be a man," cried the girl. "Go on with your story. He paid you all your husband's wages."

"Every penny—from month to month—from month to month as regular as the clock. 'If the Company stands in to be damned,' he wrote in that letter, 'I'll stand out;' and pay us he did, as I told you, though I heard the truth afterwards, and that was, that he had to pay us out of his own pocket-money—all that was allowed to him by his fool of a guardian, and that he hadn't enough to keep him as a gentleman at the college, so had to leave. But just after he'd left, the ship was spoke. She'd been caught in a tornado and dismasted—all but one; but the captain managed to sail her to one of the islands that he knew in those far waters, where he rigged up jury-masts that carried her on to Frisco, as the sailors call it. My husband got home a week ago, Miss, and we came across from Whiterocks—Williams is a Whiterocks man—to thank the young gentleman; but it was only me that was left to do the thanking, which I did with maybe a tear or two that he'll excuse. Ah, that bottle that Job hid away in the slack of his jersey! It was empty before we'd got half-way here."

They had reached the outlying houses of the village. Lily put out her hand to the woman—her eyes were wet: it was some time before she found the words for which she was struggling.

"Your story has interested me greatly—oh, greatly!" she managed to say at last. "I feel what you felt when you

went to the office of the ship and they told you that there was no money waiting for you. Oh, what a place the world is!"

"It's a bit dark sometimes," said Mrs. Williams.

"A bit dark—a bit dark; but isn't it brightened now and again, Mrs. Williams?"

"Ah, yes, Miss; that's true. But they're safer at sea than at home. We've an easier time of it when they're at sea; the Lord looks after them when they're at sea, but the wives have to look after them ashore, and it's the tougher job of the two. Listen to that, Miss—the singing—where does it come from? Ah, that's the first of the publics, I expect. The 'Real Old Green Cow'—that's the sign. There it is again. If it isn't my Job's voice at that song of his! Ah, dear Lord! how is he ever to be brought home?"

A few steps farther was the first of the three inns—an excellent type of the mock-timbered house. It had deceived many *bonâ fide* travellers and amateur archæologists, to whom the landlord discoursed of its antiquity, and had no objection to participate in the good old-fashioned custom of drinking with a guest at the guest's expense. The actual landlord was a firm of brewers, and it had been built quite eleven years. From the snug bar parlour, with its glorious old ingle nook—"so different from the modern-jerry built structures," the amateur archæologists said with much head-wagging—there came the sound of a song rendered with great feeling and vigour of expression.

Lily caught the words without great difficulty, in spite of their delivery by a voice the *timbre* of which was not favourable to methodical phrasing:

"A lightning-flash showed the corpse on the deck,
And it laughed, 'ha, ha!' till the knife in its neck
Waggled back'ards and for'ards; and that was the doom
O' the sailorman what curs'd the bobstay boom."

Then came the sound of applause—half-hearted, with a suggestion of awe in every rattle of the pewter.

"That's his song, Miss; 'The sailorman what curs'd the bobstay boom,'" said Mrs. Williams. "How am I to get him home?"

"Stay here—outside, Mrs. Williams," said Lily. "In a quarter of an hour there'll be a vehicle here, and I'm sure he'll get into it. Good-bye, I'll never forget your story—never!"

She hurried off to the house of a man farther down the High street, who did a little in the posting way. He had one brougham, a long waggonette, and a governess cart, as well as a furniture van. She saw the man and told him that she needed a vehicle to convey to his home a sailor. Something not too high it must be: she was afraid if the vehicle were high he would have difficulty getting into it.

"If it's a sailorman I think he'll be able to climb," said the man.

"Not ashore," said Lily; "and certainly not when he has been for two hours in the ingle nook of the Green Cow."

The man laughed.

"I understand your order now, Miss. We'll stow him in a handy spring van."

"And I'll pay for it, remember. Not a penny must the woman pay—she's his wife—a friend of mine."

"Never fear, Miss Cosway," said the man, bustling out.

(And here it may be mentioned that Mr. and Mrs. Job Williams reached their home at Whiterocks before nightfall, although the former, in the momentary absence of the driver, treated the reins as the rudder-yoke-lines and gave a hasty order to push off. He did not drive, in spite of his expressing his willingness to save the man that trouble, nor did he succeed in arresting the progress of the spring van by using the whip as a boat-hook.)

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON KISSES.

BUT Lily Cosway walked along the road, and instead of turning aside by the subsidiary lane that would have brought her half a mile nearer to her home, she hurried direct on to the Tower. It was now half-past six o'clock. Minna would have finished tea and would be thinking of dressing for dinner.

That was *what* she would be thinking of. *Whom* she would be thinking of Lily also fancied that she could guess.

She was right. Miss Talbot was in her dressing-room, the servant said, and Lily ran upstairs unannounced.

Minna had not begun to dress. She was lying on the little gilt sofa that imparted to the room the air of a French boudoir of the Eighteenth Century. Lily flung herself upon her, kneeling beside the sofa, with her arms locked around the neck of her friend.

"Good heavens! Why this smothering?" cried Minna.

"You know—you know," said Lily. "I'm sure you came to see me to-day to tell me all."

"Well, I certainly called," said Minna. "But . . . ah, how can you possibly know . . . what there is to know?"

Her voice had sunk into a whisper, and that whisper was tremulous.

"How?—how?" cried Lily. "Ah, when you left me on that evening when we had the long talk together in the garden, I waited at the gate. I saw him meet you—I looked out on the road—I saw him take your hand—then I knew."

"I am overwhelmed with confusion," said Minna. "But indeed I meant to tell you all to-day—I went to tell you, but you were not at home. I was afraid—we had been talking of him, you and I, and I was afraid—ah, my dearest, I should have confided in you at first; I should have told you that I loved him the first moment that I saw him. He is the best man that the world holds—ah, he is the only man that the world holds for me."

"He is the truest man that lives!" cried Lily. "Until a few hours ago I did not think him good enough for you, Minna—that was why I went out to-day, feeling sure that you would call: I could not have said a good word to you. But now—now—oh, I have heard in the most casual way imaginable of an act that he did—an act that no man but one having the true heart of a man would have done; that is why I hurried to you now—my heart was full of it—it is still full of it. He is the truest man in the world, and you will always—always be happy with him—he is worthy of you, my dearest, and there is no other man in the world whom I would think worthy of you."

"My Lilyflower, he is more than worthy of me," murmured Minna. "I can never hope to be so good as he is; but I will hope. I knew you would come to me. What would his love be worth to me if you had not come to me? Oh, my dear, I thought it so impossible that he could love me—me. What am I compared to him? What am I that I should have lifted my eyes to him? But I did—I called

myself living in a Paradise of Fools, and yet—ah, he is the truest man alive! I shall live to make him happy—not so happy as he deserves to be, but still happy.”

“Happy! Oh, you’ll both be happy, and I—I will be happy too, for I know you. I’ve known you always, and I know him—now. I could not sleep without telling you that I had come to know him—now—that he was worthy of my best and dearest.”

They clasped and kissed and the eyes of both were shining with tears of happiness. Then each sighed. It was as if they felt the coming of a man between them—a man whose mission it is to divide asunder the maiden friendships, to arrest for evermore the maiden confidences—a man who builds up for himself a friendship with a woman upon the *débris* of her maiden friendships.

“And now I must get home,” said Lily. “Half an hour ago I had no idea that I would see you this evening. I have told you that I actually went for that long walk to-day to avoid your visit. If I had seen you an hour ago I should not have had a word to speak worthy of what has happened; but now——”

“What have you heard, my Lily?”

“You will hear it at another time; I cannot trust myself to tell it to you—my heart is too full. Good-bye, good-bye.”

Minna let her go, for her tears were beginning to fall at the very thought of the story that the woman had told her on the road to Ashdown.

All the bitterness of the jealousy which had come to her two evenings before had passed away. She had loved him then—it had been revealed to her at that moment. But somehow since she had heard how well he had behaved toward the wives of those sailors all the jealousy had passed away from her. All that she felt was what she had told Minna. Minna was worthy of him, and he—surely she had spoken the truth when she had said that he was the noblest man that lived. What other man would have been ready to sacrifice his own future for the sake of helping those people, who were really nothing more to him than to the other shareholders of the Company? And she had sneered at his being sent down by the University authorities! She knew the truth now. His allowance was not sufficient to keep *him at his college* while he was paying away every month

that money to the relations of the men aboard the missing ship; he had therefore adopted the plan which most readily suggested itself to him of severing his connection with the University. He had outraged the proprieties by some prank and had been duly sent down. That was his way of doing things. He would not simply leave the University of his own accord and try to explain to his narrow-minded guardian why he had left it; that would have involved his telling how he had got rid of his allowance, and Colonel Passmore would most certainly have taken the view of the Directors of the Passmore Packets—it would be so like him to do so—and the women would run a chance of being left to starve. Ah, Willie Passmore's way had been the best. What was the good of thinking whether or not it had weak points? It was the way of a man—a true man who was ready to sacrifice himself for the benefit of some people whom he had never seen in all his life, and whom it was extremely unlikely that he would ever see.

In her admiration for the man who had left Oxford without taking his degree, she felt growing in her heart a firm resolution never to look with friendly eyes upon a man who had taken any sort of degree—no matter how low down his name might have been placed in the lists. She felt that it would be quite impossible for her to entertain feelings of even the most moderate cordiality for such a man. Why, any one could take a degree; but how many men would have the greatness of character to sacrifice themselves for the sake of benefiting a dozen women of the very ordinary class from whom sailors usually choose their wives?

Yes, Miss Cosway, B.A., felt that she could never look with friendly eyes upon a man who had taken a degree.

She had never looked with friendly eyes upon Willie Passmore. She remembered that now—now when it was too late. Too late? She had never been in time. He had never had a thought of her. He had had thoughts only for Minna. And yet, what was that look which had been in his eyes when he had turned to her on the night when he was leaving the drawing-room at the Tower? What had he said when going to the door?

"You can do a bit of sprinting when you try, Miss Cosway. It took me walking all I know to catch up on you."

She stopped and faced him. It was now dusk, so that

she flattered herself he would not be able to perceive the flush that was on her face—or perhaps he would attribute it to her rapid walking. That was really her first thought.

She put out her hand to him.

“I was thinking of you—of you only,” she said.

“And you were trying to hurry away from your thoughts? Well, I can understand that too. For that matter I was thinking of you; but I didn’t hurry. I know a better word than hurry. Do you know what that word is?”

“Tell me.”

“It’s ‘Wait.’ Whenever I think about you I say to myself ‘Wait.’ I’m saying it now. I thought I’d tell you. I’m waiting. Good-bye.”

“Don’t go,” she cried, almost piteously. “Surely you can’t go away before I tell you that I have just been with Minna and she told me all.”

“The deuce she did. All! Great apothecary!” said he.

“All. And I told her that I believed you to be the best man that lives in the world.”

“What! You told her that? You’re up to some lark—some sell for an innocent Johnnie like me.”

“I told her what I felt to be the truth. I feel more strongly every moment that it is the truth.”

“You do? Then I’m hanged if I wait a minute longer.”

“You will wait until I tell you all. When we first met I thought you—well, not stupid, only——”

“A lout? Say it; don’t mind me.”

“Not a lout; only—well, not what I know you to be now. When you told me at the dance at Weighborough that you allowed me to sit out with Mr. Clifford the dance which I had promised you, I wondered if it was possible that I could have been mistaken in you—that there was something beneath that assumption of——”

“Loutishness—I’m not thin-skinned.”

“Not loutishness, but something different from anything I had ever known—want of character, I may call it.”

“You’ve let me off easy. Want of character? Too much character you might call it, only not of the right sort. Well?”

“But still I fancied—I mean that I fancied I fancied you to be only a little better than a commonplace young man. And that was why, when I saw you take Minna’s hand on

the road—yes, just where we are standing now—two evenings ago, I felt—I pretended to feel—that you were unworthy of her.”

“Unworthy of her? Lord, I should think that I was. Who was talking about anyone being worthy of her?”

“I am talking about it now. You are worthy of her. My eyes were opened to-day. I heard from Mrs. Williams all about the ship—the *Sydney Packet*; I found out what a fool I had been—it was because I had been shut up in school all my life, learning nothing about human beings, but plenty about mummies—that’s what Miss Larkspur called the sort of studies which I was forced to pursue. But Minna was not a fool. She knew you from the first, and that is why I know that you will be happy with her and that she will be happy with you. She understands you; you understand her.”

“I do,” said Willie, taking the hand that she offered him, but declining to let it go. “I understand her. She understands me. But by the Lord Harry, I don’t understand you. Have you been congratulating her on being in love with—with me—me?”

“Oh, don’t ask me to say anything more; I’ve said enough.”

“Enough? I should think you have said enough. You’ve been congratulating Minna Talbot on being in love with the wrong man. She’s not in love with me, but with Oswald Clifford, and I’m not in love with her, because I happen to be in love with you, and, by God, you’re in love with me, strange though it seems, and, by God, I’ll not loose your hand until—oh, Lord, she’s fainting! Lily, Lily—my darling, my own love; I’m a fool as usual; I’ve frightened you to the point of death.”

He had put his arms about her and had carried her through the little iron pillars at the small side gate over which he had first seen her.

“No—no—I’m not—oh, I’ve no notion of fainting,” said she. (But this was after she had felt his arms about her.) “I’m quite awake, only—I think I must have fallen asleep—a queer dream!”

“A queer dream! No, you have me, and I’m not much of a dream,” said he. “I don’t care the toss of a penny what you say to me now. You love me as I love you. I told Minna two evenings ago that I was in love with you,

and she said that she knew you loved me, but that you didn't know it."

"She said that?"

"She did. She knew you better than you knew yourself. Do you know now that you love me?"

"I do—I do—I do."

"Take down your hands from your face. Were you ever kissed—soundly kissed—thirteen to the dozen—by a man with some self-respect?"

"Never."

"Well, you're going to have that experience now. You'll find it better than a year at Newnham."

And she did.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THEOLOGY.

THE Historian of the Second Century was not at all irritated at his daughter's appearance at the dinner-table with her hair disordered even beyond the limits of disorderliness consistent with the freedom of the hour in the matter of the hair of a woman; nor did he complain of her wearing a walking dress instead of a dinner one. He was tolerant. He knew that these incidents were portents.

What did they portend?

He waited.

Her artificial gaiety which he had noticed in the morning had disappeared. Her face was glowing with life. So things glow when they have had their first taste of life, whether they find it sweet or bitter, or like the prophet's roll, sweet and bitter in turn.

She had apologies for her dress. She had had many curious adventures on the way home, and she had been greatly delayed. There was a woman—a stranger—her husband was a sailor, and he had had a miraculous escape from shipwreck. It had made his speech thick and had lent colour to his imagination, so that he walked uneasily as *if on the deck of a ship labouring in a heavy gale*. His

wife had her theories regarding the relative duties of Providence and The Wife in respect of the care of a sailorman. Providence, it appeared, accepted the risk at sea; but declined the responsibility on shore; and here it was that the duties of The Wife as a supplemental Providence became onerous—according to Mrs. Williams, at least.

“Wasn't there a rhyme about a certain 'sweet little cherub that sits up aloft'?” Lily asked, pausing in her fluent story.

“Yes; that's how the poet puts it. A cherub? Perhaps. Sits?—I've my doubts about the sitting,” said her father. “The composition of sea-songs is not an exact science, though bordering here and there upon matters which have at all ages called for consideration in a scientific spirit. The legitimate use of alcohol: the marriage question and its relation to foreign ports: the phenomena of that subtle element known as the Ghost.”

“I only heard one stanza of the song of Boatswain Williams,” said Lily. “Its subject, so far as I could gather, was closely associated with the question of the cognizance by a Retributive Power of the ordinary Acts of Humanity.” Her parody of her father's style was extremely delicate. He relished it exceedingly. It was the humour of a vintage year. He perceived that his daughter had succeeded in getting rid of that mood of hers which had been displayed in her fit of feverish gaiety.

“The lyricist assumed the affirmative in that question, I doubt not,” said the historian.

“With considerable fervour,” said she.

“All semi-civilized people say 'yes' to that dogma,” said he. “Its origin is by no means obscure. The secret-service system of the most primitive rulers of certain communities was necessarily of an elementary character; but still it must have had some sort of organisation. The power of the ruler was increased in proportion as he succeeded in making the common people believe that he was cognisant of all their movements. Thus it was that this power came to be associated with a ruler, and as the most distinguished rulers were deified by the communities whom they swayed, the same capacity became an attribute of the God.”

“Boatswain Williams did not work out the question in precisely the same principle of scientific research,” said Lily. “The song he chose to illustrate his theory dealt with the

doom—keep ‘doom’ in your mind, please; it is the rhyme-word—‘the doom—of the sailorman what curs’d the bobstay boom.’ He had become a corpse, and yet he is represented as laughing—the laugh imitated incidentally with startling effect—and a knife was stuck in his throat.”

“And I have no doubt that the song was so worded as to preclude all sympathy from the unfortunate sufferer,” remarked her father, gravely.

“Sympathy? My dear papa, how could any sympathy be legitimately given to such a wretch? The bobstay boom!—think of it—an innocent bobstay boom. And yet that miscreant made it the subject of such objurgation as probably occupied several of the earlier stanzas—I fortunately missed hearing them. ‘The bobstay boom.’”

“There are several ‘booms’ that he might have made the subject of his objurgation quite legitimately,” said Mr. Cosway. “The project for a new and uniform edition of the historical (so called) works of Joseph Croker, for instance, about which leading articles are being written in all the papers.”

“Oh, Joseph Croker!”

“Then there is that fiction by one Passington who goes epigrammatic through three volumes—it is being paraphrased daily.”

“All legitimate subjects for vituperation; and yet the bobstay boom was the only one that that wretch . . . oh, sympathy is impossible in such a case,” laughed Lily.

“Utterly,” said her father. “So as you have something on your mind that you wish to communicate to me, I’ll go with you to the drawing-room for half an hour.”

She felt how delightful, after all, it was to have such a father—a father who was clever enough to understand what her mood was, and to sympathise with it to the extent of half an hour’s fooling. It had always been the same with him, she recollected. Even though he did sometimes profess to use her as the working model of a woman, he had rarely failed to—well, not exactly to sympathise with her moods, but to understand them. Was understanding the same as sympathy, she wondered. Perhaps it was. At any rate it was something; and as for her position relative to her father and his studies, well, the working model was a distinct vocation.

“I notice with satisfaction,” said Mr. Cosway, when they

were together in the drawing-room, "that your sense of responsibility in respect of Minna Talbot is a trifle dulled."

The girl gave a laugh—her father thought that it was on the whole the pleasantest laugh that he had ever heard from her.

"One of us was undoubtedly a fool, but that one was not Minna," said Lily. "If Providence did not sometimes take us in hand, where would we be?"

"Where indeed?" said her father. "When a young woman speaks handsomely of Providence we may take it for granted that Providence has dealt handsomely in regard to her. The government of the affairs of the world is not so deplorable after all, if one young woman has heard from the lips of one particular young man that he loves her—on second thoughts I withdraw the adjective from the young man."

"Now you are back in your tub," said Lily.

"Who is the man?" said her father.

"There is only one man in the world," said she. "You have often said so—one man and one woman."

"I had not Master Passmore in my eye when I made that remark about the man; I suppose I did make it."

"Willie Passmore is the best man that lives in the world—possibly the best that has ever lived in it; but I don't insist on that point."

"A graceful concession—generous, too—but insincere. It is an empty compliment to the sex of Willie Passmore. Still, a young woman cannot love a man without paying a compliment to a portion of mankind. Kiss me, my dear child."

She flung herself into his arms, and was kissing and sobbing on his neck in a moment. That was what she had been yearning for for some time—say, fifty minutes.

After a time she lifted up her head from his shoulder, and put a hand on each of his cheeks, and then kissed him slowly and with deliberation.

"Great heaven!" she thought—and her father knew it. "Great heaven! that up till an hour ago I never thought that a kiss was anything beyond this—this—this!"

She seemed to have entered a new world—a world in which the Kiss presented possibilities undreamt of in the old days as a medium of expression. During the past fifty-five minutes—or thereabouts—she seemed to be looking

down a vista of kisses. Kisses were on each side of her—out to the horizon, where the heaven bowed down to kiss the earth. And she had previously regarded the Kiss as something only a degree or two warmer in temperature than the handshake.

She was in the position of the amateur who had looked on his fiddle as a pleasant enough companion until he heard Paganini.

"Now I am my old self again," she said to her father, when her sobs were over and she had put her cheek against his face.

"No, no; never again—never again will you be your old self," said her father. "You may occasionally catch stray glimpses of your old self; but be it—never again."

"Well!" said she.

"Well?" said he. "Ah, I know that tone. It means that if you never catch a glimpse of your old self you will not die of despair. So we cast off our old acquaintance. And yet I read the review of a book that asserted that we should know our friends in heaven. How should we know them? Now tell me all your adventures."

She told him all—from the great awakening on that evening when she had been stung with jealousy of Minna, seeing her on the road by the side of Willie Passmore, and that terrible revelation had come to her that it was she who loved Willie Passmore—down to the question that Willie Passmore had asked her, probably an hour before. Only she said nothing about what she thought of the Kiss: she did not arrogate to herself the tongues of men and of angels. She merely said—

"Then he gave me a kiss."

Her father smiled.

"He increased by a league or two the boundaries of the horizon of your imagination, and you saw some glorious regions in the interspace," said he. "And you are lost in admiration of the clever fellow who was able to work such a miracle."

"A miracle indeed," said she. "But the world seems filled with miracles."

"It does—to the child that has just opened its eyes upon the world," said he.

"And finds it better than any world its little soul had *knowledge* of previously: I can quite appreciate the feelings

of the infant. I wonder if in any of the soul's previous worlds the science of higher mathematics is held in great esteem."

"It is a legitimate subject for enquiry—philosophical enquiry. Thank God, my child, that you were not led to love a philosophical enquirer. Your Willie is a thoroughly good chap—I believe the correct term is a Johnnie—however, even if I am, from a strictly academic standpoint, somewhat in arrears as regards phrases, you will understand that I mean well when I call him a good chap. What did you say were the sentences that he wrote in his letter to the wives of the ship's company?"

"They were the best words ever written," said Lily. She had already repeated them to her father in giving him a circumstantial account of her meeting with Mrs. Williams. "They were the best words ever written: he said that if the company stood in to be damned they might, but that he would stand out."

"He put his ideas into a shape that he knew would be perfectly intelligible to the persons whom he addressed," said Mr. Cosway. "The idea of a Limited Liability Company with fully paid up shares going to perdition is almost epic. I wonder if the assumption is tenable. Would a professional theologian be able to decide it at a moment's notice? When a company acts in a way that seems thoroughly condemnatory, are the shareholders damned individually or merely the directors collectively?"

"Willie's assumption was, I fancy, the broader one," said Lily. "I'd gladly ask him what his idea was exactly, only that I have my doubts as to the value of his opinions on any theological question."

"And the difficulty in the way of putting the question to any professional theologian is to be found in the circumstance that so many professional theologians are shareholders in companies whose conduct is eminently condemnatory. Now if they were to take the more liberal view of the question, that would involve the damning of professional theologians, which would be, as Euclid says, absurd."

"Oh, my dear father, do not let us talk of questions any more; only bless me—bless me also, O my father!" cried Lily.

"You are a good girl," said he. "You are also a woman,

since he gave you that kiss—the one kiss that you mentioned. It was revealed to me quite recently that you were on the way to womanhood.”

“Yes,” said she; “you knew it when I said something about a cowboy at lunch.”

“I knew it on the day that you talked to me of the joy of making little shirts for still less baby boys—they must be chubby, you said.”

“Great heavens, papa! What on earth—well, I have my ideas as to the making of little shirts.”

“May you never have any higher aspiration than the making of those garments, my beloved—that’s the blessing given to you by your father, who has observed many men and many women in a world which seems to me—I hope I’m not absurdly optimistic—particularly well adapted as a place of residence for men and women.”

Then Lily communicated to her father a point upon which Willie had laid considerable stress in the course of a hurried conversation that he had with her just before she had left him at the little side gate—this point had reference to the time that must elapse before he could ask her to marry him. Two years and three months seemed an interminable time to the girl—a space to be referred to with staccato pouts and downcast looks and impatient references to the incomprehensible foolishness of the late Mr. Passmore, who, it appeared, was ignorant to a lamentable degree of the real character of his son.

But Mr. Cosway was disposed to take a more generous view of the conduct of the gentleman who had left his son at least a quarter of a million to amuse himself with on attaining the age of twenty-five. Indeed, according to Mr. Cosway, the outlook for the moment was not such as could reasonably be regarded with any great apprehension. Two years and three months might, of course, be considered a rather long space of time. (He knew better than to try and argue out this point with her. He had heard that time travels at divers paces with divers persons, and he was well aware that it was outside his power to make his daughter believe that two years, even with the odd three months behind them, would pass but too swiftly for him, at any rate, whom that space would deprive of his daughter.) But after all, he reminded her that at the age of twenty-five a man *could really not* be considered past his prime. If he had a

good constitution to start with, and took a moderate amount of care of himself, he might reasonably look forward to some years of life before the hardships of old age took hold of him.

That was perfectly true, no doubt, Lily admitted; but still . . .

She went to her room and threw herself upon her bed with a half-articulate cry—an expression as of a great yearning satisfied. The rapture of his kisses still encompassed her; and with her face down upon her pillow she whispered, “My darling! my darling! my beloved!”

Those were the words that he had said to her at every pause—the pauses were not numerous—in that cannonade of kisses with which he had assaulted her.

What words they were!—the best words that had ever sounded in her ears—the words for which she had waited all her life. Oh, those people who had suggested to her that love was the best thing in life had spoken the truth, though she had never recognised it before. Ah, it was not only the best thing in life—it was life itself—there was nothing worth talking about in life except love—such love as was now beating in her heart, every beat sending a throb of joy through her. Of course it could hardly be possible that such love as hers was experienced by many people in the world; but even making due deductions, the net happiness that was derived from love by the people who had talked to her about it must have been very great. They had spoken according to their lights, and they certainly had not exaggerated the glorifying power of the passion.

Once her sense of happiness found expression in a torrent of tears.

This was when it flashed across her that she had more than once referred to him in terms of contempt. What had she called him? A lout? A cub? The travesty of a cowboy? Great heavens! What was that madness which had come over her? She had called him—him—the prince of men—the travesty of a cowboy! Oh, it was madness—it was a strange blindness that had come to her, preventing her from discerning the truth. She had heard the story of the prince who had left his own kingdom and had gone out into the world, where he was treated with derision, as though he had been a common man, until someone came who revealed his princeliness.

Surely that was a parable of love; for until love had revealed to her the princship of her prince, had not she treated him with scorn?

A torrent of tears was insufficient to wash away the stain that she had put on herself in regard to this matter. Oh, surely she should be pardoned! Surely the pardon of the one who errs in blindness might be claimed by her. She had been blind, but now love had brought to her light and clear vision: she could never again err.

Some hours had passed before sweet sleep came to that sweet thing, who fancied that love, the blind, was the most trustworthy guide in the world to those regions of clear atmosphere where all things are seen as they are, not as they once seemed to be.

And yet she had become acquainted with all the wisdom of the sages who had been assuring the world for some thousands of years, through the medium of alcaics, sapphics, hendecasyllables, and especially trocaics, that love was a form of blindness.

Miss Cosway, B.A., was ready, after a few hours' experience, to assure the world that, until one fell in love, one's eyesight was most treacherous, but immediately afterwards it might be implicitly depended on. She could, if she had been so disposed, have communicated this discovery to the world through the medium of any Greek metre that still survived the burning of libraries; but it is doubtful if, had she done so, it would have inspired the great mass of humanity with confidence in love as an oculist, in the face of the very respectable authorities who had given intelligible expression to just the contrary opinion, and whose views, though communicated through the purest Greek dialects, are as respectfully disregarded by lovers as though they were expressed in an English lyric.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON STYLE.

It was altogether disgraceful! That was the opinion of some people who had been informed by Willie Passmore of the attitude assumed by his uncle when told in the most respectful manner possible by Willie himself (the statement

as to the respectfulness of the manner rested only on the uncorroborated testimony of Willie) of the cordial understanding arrived at between Lily Cosway and himself.

Did the Colonel know of any reason why they should not be married early in June? He had asked his uncle; but to his (Willie's) amazement—though to be sure he should not have been amazed, knowing so well as he did what a damfool his uncle had always been—Colonel Passmore had declared that he could only get married when he came of age. It was all to no purpose, Willie said, that he had asked quite respectfully (again the question of the respect rested solely upon the evidence of the narrator) what reason there was for such ridiculous delay. Why should there be any postponement of a ceremony which was inevitable? His uncle remained obdurate as ever. He actually had the effrontery to suggest that his nephew had had no right to ask any girl to marry him without having previously informed at least one of his guardians of his intention, and having asked his permission to take such a step—a most serious, and he might almost add compromising, step; “but one from which I'll do my best to extricate you, my boy, out of the affection I bear to your poor father,” he had added.

“Then I replied to him,” said Willie (he said nothing whatever about the respectfulness of his demeanour in making the reply). “Yes, I told him pretty plainly what I thought of him—what *we* thought of him. I had him in a rage surpassing all his previous outbursts—a regular blizzard—in a very few minutes; and then I turned Aunt Immy on him, and she slanged him in the language of the Pacific Slope until I was hoping our difficulties would be solved in a moment by a kindly apoplexy. But unluckily he had strength enough to rush out of doors and down the garden, and so saved himself.”

It was at this point that his audience gave expression to the belief that Colonel Passmore, late of the Corps of Royal Engineers, was a perfect brute, and that his attitude was altogether disgraceful. Was there no way by which he could be bound over?

Willie shook his head. He would not say a word against his dear old dad, but that will of his was certainly the most ridiculous one that could have been devised. It limited his allowance to the merest pittance, and it made it impossible for him to take any step in life without the consent of both

his guardians. No, he wouldn't say a word against his dad; on the contrary, he would take the most charitable view possible of the will, and assume that it had been made when the testator was suffering from softening of the brain. He hoped that the malady was not hereditary.

Miss Larkspur called at the Cottage in the course of the day, and fully concurred with all that Willie had said regarding the foolishness of her associate guardian. Could the old man hope that his nephew would ever find a sweeter or a better wife than Lily Cosway, the daughter of Professor Cosway? she enquired.

"Oh, of course he could easily find a better one," Lily said. "He'll have two years and three months at any rate to look about him. Is it on record that a man remained faithful to a girl for two years and three months?"

Miss Larkspur thought that there were well-authenticated instances of that phenomenon; but she was compelled to admit that in all of them with which she was acquainted the man was a good deal the senior of her nephew.

"Great apothecary!" cried that nephew; "do you mean to tell me that I'm likely to see anyone during the next two years that I'll love better than you?"

He addressed Lily, not Miss Larkspur.

"Perhaps not," said Lily; "perhaps not in two years; but you've three months beyond that. A lot of unfaithfulness can be got through in three months, if you only keep your eyes open."

"Then I'll shut them," said he. "Or I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll start on a two years' voyage round the world. That'll keep me employed."

Lily shook her head. She had doubts as to the efficacy of a voyage round the world in keeping a man's heart fixed upon his first love—she assumed that she was Willie's first love.

"After all, now that I come to think of it, I'm glad that Colonel Passmore remains obdurate," said she, after a long pause that suggested earnest thought.

"You're glad? Oh, then I'll say no more," cried Willie.

"The two years and three months will test our truth," said she. "It may be that we don't know our own minds."

"Our minds have got nothing to say to it; it's our hearts, and we know them, don't we?" cried he.

"Oh, yes," she said, "we know them; but I think we'll respec-

know them better at the end of"—the sigh that came from her startled her—"two years."

"And three months, dammit!" said he.

"You're quite right, my dear," said Miss Larkspur to Lily. "You're quite right: the twenty-seven months——"

"Oh, Lord! doesn't it sound bad reduced to months?" moaned Willie. "Better bring out a quotient of days when you're about it."

"The twenty-seven months will do you both much good. The human heart as a security ain't worth much on the Street."

"On the Street? On what street?" he asked.

"What street? There's only one street—Wall Street, my lad," said Miss Larkspur. "I've done a flutter myself on the Street before now, but I've never heard tell of a quotation being given in hearts. Now, I opine that you can't go one better than what our Lily has said. If you were to get married to-morrow who knows but you'd both—well, anyone of you would be enough—think in the course of a year or two that you might have done more for yourselves?"

"How could we do more for ourselves?" asked Willie.

"Well, you might think that if you'd waited for a year or two you'd have got someone better—you'd be wrong, but I've heard tell of husbands that were very warm as lovers singing that tune of discontent after a while."

"And maybe they had reasons," said he. "But I'm rather differently situated. Great Lord, Henrietta! Think of me married to her—*her*—look at her and then look at me—think of me married to her—and then grumbling because I might have done better! Go 'way, Aunt Immy! You may know a heap about folks in general, but you don't take enough account of individual cases. The idea of my thinking that I might—— Oh, go 'way!"

"Miss Larkspur is quite right," said Lily. "If we're true to each other at the end of two years and three months then we may safely get married, feeling sure that there'll be no repining on either side at the end of a year—I suppose no married people repine for the first year. Yes, I'm glad—glad that—that—your uncle is such a horrid old fool, and that he's behaving so outrageously toward us."

"Girls can bring themselves to say anything," remarked Willie.

"They can: I said that I'd marry you," whispered Lily.

But Willie was not the man to be stayed with whispers or comforted with caresses. He grumbled like a bear or a retired naval officer at the brutality—he went the length of calling it brutality—of his uncle.

It was late in the day when his uncle had an interview with Mr. Cosway—Willie had his interview with the historian earlier and came out of it with flying colours, Mr. Cosway assuring him that he had every confidence in his ability to spend the full amount of money that he had been left by his father, and that he felt certain that his efforts in the same direction would be ably supplemented by his, the speaker's, daughter.

The Colonel was in a very jovial mood. Of course boys would be boys, he chuckled, pulling out his moustache like a binocular telescope; but equally of course, Mr. Cosway and he, who were men of the world, were aware that boys and girls did not know their own minds—as a matter of fact, they frequently had no minds to know.

Mr. Cosway cordially agreed with him; for he had, he said, come in contact with men—actually men—who had lived for several years in the world without giving the smallest evidence of possessing a mind.

"Of course, of course," acquiesced the Colonel. "But with regard to my nephew and your daughter, Mr. Cosway, it would, I think you will agree with me, be absurd to treat their little business seriously."

"I mean to treat the promise of your nephew to marry my daughter with the utmost seriousness, I can assure you," said the historian.

"Good Lord, sir! you don't mean to say that you look on the spooning of a boy and girl as something to take notice of?" cried the Colonel.

"I know nothing about what you call spooning," said Mr. Cosway. "I assume, however, that you make use of the word as implying an exchange of those caresses which are almost the natural result of contiguity, and those osculatory passages—some of them incipient—for the other sex is allowed a certain latitude in fickle humour—if, I say, you *are content* that I should assume that your use of the word *implied these passages*, I can promise you, Colonel Passmore, *that I would not be inclined to refer to them with any pre-*

ponderance of the solemn in my speech. But when a man of twenty-three years of age——”

“Twenty-two, sir—my nephew is only twenty-two,” interposed the Colonel, rather weakly; but what stand can an ordinary officer of ordnance make against polysyllables and a Style?

“Twenty-two and nine months,” said Mr. Cosway. “When such a man, I repeat, approaches me with a view of obtaining my consent to his espousing my daughter of twenty-two years of age, I cannot see any escape from the seriousness of a reply.”

“Sir,” said Colonel Passmore, apeing a Style also; but achieving only a very attenuated imitation—a Bardolph in the presence of a Falstaff of style. “Sir, I perceive that you are fully aware of the advantage likely to accrue to— to your family through an alliance with the son of a quarter of a millionaire.”

“I am fully aware of the fact that in two years and nine months your nephew will inherit the considerable amount of property left to him by his late father,” said Mr. Cosway.

“A quarter of a million, sir, in cash and shares in the Passmore Packets, and about fifty thousand in house property. By Gad, sir, he owns the very roof over your head,” cried Colonel Passmore. He was plainly indignant at Mr. Cosway’s undefined reference to the inheritance of Willie; hence his voice broadened into a shout in the end.

“I am glad to learn from so excellent an authority as you are that the property is of such respectable dimensions,” said Mr. Cosway. “My solicitors will receive ample instructions from me, on the basis you have so generously furnished, in regard to my daughter’s settlement—in two years and three months.”

“Not a day sooner, sir,” cried the Colonel. “The boy might have aspired to the hand of the daughter of a peer—a quarter of a million will secure the proudest in the land, let me tell you, sir.”

“Into the delicate question of the latest quotations on the market for the commodity to which you refer I have no leisure to enter, however profitable such an excursion would be under so efficient a guide as I have no doubt you are,” said Mr. Cosway. “I only know that your nephew’s aspirations are limited to my daughter—at least I believe that *they are.*”

"Oh, he has always been a young fool, but I'll be a match for him—never fear—more than a match for him!" said the Colonel.

"Assuming that he is a fool, and that there are varying degrees of foolishness, I dare not question for a moment the likelihood of your surpassing him on his own ground, as you assert is in your power," said the historian.

"I have the honour to wish you good-afternoon, sir," said the Colonel, with overwhelming formality; he had brought his heels together, and his left arm was straight down by his side; he was holding his hat about two inches over the polished hemisphere of his head.

"Nay, sir," said Mr. Cosway, drawing upon his memories of the Eighteenth Century. "Nay, sir, the honour is on my side."

He also had his impressive resources.

So they parted; Colonel Passmore having an uneasy feeling that if he was making a retreat not altogether devoid of dignity, he had not gained much by his interview with Mr. Cosway. He had even a suspicion that there was a suggested insult offered to him in the apparently complimentary phrase with which his antagonist had retorted to his formal farewell. The suspicion was a small one, but it gave him as great uneasiness as that insidious insect of South America known as the jigger imparts to the toe where it lurks.

But Mr. Cosway returned to his literary work with a moderately agreeable consciousness of having overwhelmed an opponent—yes, but what an opponent! The historian felt that Colonel Passmore was altogether unworthy of meeting him in a duel. Still, the elephant that can uproot a tree does not disdain to pick up a pin—for a consideration.

Mr. Cosway felt some measure of gratification.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON PEACHES.

LILY COSWAY could not conceal the fact that she had before her a somewhat delicate task: she had offered her very sincere congratulations to her friend Minna Talbot, on the assumption that Minna had acknowledged her love for—

well, for another man than the one to whom, as Lily shortly afterwards found out, she actually had given her promise of love. Now, of course, any girl possessing an average amount of dexterity should be able to make a friend understand, even if the point came forward for consideration afterwards, that no mistake had occurred in such a case: congratulations of that sort are, after all, upon the securing of a man, not of any man in particular. Hadn't Lily herself said something long ago about the trapper and the beaver?

Unfortunately, however, Lily had been specific in her congratulations: she had, she said, become possessed by chance of some information regarding the man to whom she assumed her friend had given her promise of love, and though the exact nature of this information she had not communicated, yet she had said that she would communicate it upon another occasion.

Under these circumstances, she could not but feel that her task was one demanding tact as well as discrimination. She had come to this conclusion before Willie Passmore arrived at the Cottage to make use of that gratifying bad language in regard to his uncle—bad language that was very grateful to the ears of Lily.

Later on, she asked Willie if he had had any chance of employing the bad language in the presence of Minna, and his reply was that he had been to the Tower even before he had come to the Cottage. Didn't he owe everything to Minna? he asked. Would he be sitting as he was at that moment—it is unnecessary to say exactly how he was sitting—but for the friendly offices of Minna? Oh, yes; he had gone to her, and she had expressed her delight, even going the length of laughing heartily at the realization of her predictions regarding Lily's awaking to a knowledge of her own heart.

"Oh, she laughed?" said Lily.

"Yes; but immediately afterwards she became grave—as grave as you are at this moment"—Lily was indeed very grave. "Yes, and she said that she'd come to you this afternoon. Her brother Gerald is to pay a visit to the Tower to-morrow, and he intends to stay for a month. I hope you won't go over to her brother and leave me alone. I don't like any girl that you're particularly friendly with having a brother. Brothers are a great mistake. Do you know Gerald Talbot?"

"I know him," said Lily. "You needn't be afraid of him. He is one of those queer men who go about with their heads in the clouds."

"Oh, in the clouds?" said he. "Well, I don't know but that that sort of Johnnie gets on well with girls. They like poetical Johnnies, don't you know?"

"You never were more mistaken in your life," said she. "Poets? Oh, dear, no. Girls are not quite so idiotic as you seem to fancy they are. And as for Gerald Talbot—did you ever see any of his pictures?"

"Never. Pictures aren't in my line—unless living pictures like the one you see framed by that looking-glass over there."

She glanced across the room. The girandole certainly contained a very interesting tableau. She laughed.

"You should see some of his pictures," she said. "They are studies in the ghastly—he has even tried a ghost or two."

"It's no wonder that he keeps his head in the clouds. If he didn't he might catch a glimpse of some of the pictures he has perpetrated."

"He's the leading exponent of the horrible. He says he'll live or die by his 'Slaughter of the Innocents.'"

"Let us hope he'll die by it. I'm not so much afraid of him as I was."

"Afraid of him? Well, I'm healthy, whatever else I may be; and he hates everything except what's morbid."

"Oh, you may go to see him every day."

"The first time I met him he said he'd love to paint me when I was dead: he thought he could see his way clearly to immortalize me by painting me when I was dead. He declared that he hadn't enough colour in his case of tubes to do my cheeks and lips as they were when he saw them; but he could make a success of them if I allowed him to use the tubes he had—they were mostly grey, with a touch of green."

"And you didn't allow him?"

"I laughed until I shocked him: he said that I was hopeless—he meant hopelessly blousy, and so I was."

"Had the damfool never seen a peach?"—Willie was getting indignant. "Blousy . . ."

She laughed again.

"A peach!" she cried. "Yes, he'd seen a peach; but here are certain people who decline to look at the pink side

of a peach, and insist on looking at the other side—the side that suggests jaundice—unless the fruit has been ripened all round. Such people will tell you that the colour of a peach is not pink, but a greenish yellow.”

“They’re fools—damfools! Thank God, I know the colour and . . . (here there was an interval for refreshments) the taste of a peach.”

“A peony,” said Lily to the reflection in the mirror.

In the afternoon Minna made her call, and the claspings and kisses of the previous evening were renewed.

“You told him that I would awake, and you see you were right,” whispered Lily. “And I do believe that papa had the same idea, only, of course, he didn’t suggest it. He waited for the awaking to come, in order that he might study the phenomenon of development and apply it to some phase of one of the characters with which he is dealing in the new volume of his history. Tell me, Minna, how you knew that I was at the point of awakening.”

“Oh, you made me aware of it every day,” cried Minna. “But I was really only certain of it when you went out of your way to say unkind things of Willie. No girl goes out of her way to say unkind things about a man unless she is at the point of falling in love with him.”

“Oh! And did you say any unkind things about—about—Mr. Clifford?” asked Lily.

Minna shook her head gravely.

“Alas! alas!” she said.

“You said horrid things about him?”

“And thought much more horrid. Shall I ever be forgiven?”

“Oh, I don’t think that there should be much trouble about forgiving you. But I can’t tell you how surprised I am. I’m beginning to feel the truth of what you said, my dear: we’re all the same, we women; though, of course, I’m at a disadvantage among women, having spent my early years studying the philosophy of love—Eros it is in Greek, Amor in Latin; these are the simplest forms, but each can be traced back and back—oh, yes, I wasted my time over the shadow when I should have been giving some attention to the substance.”

“You needn’t lament,” said Minna. “Oh, no; all has come right.”

"That's true; but I've had a narrow escape—I feel that, indeed," said Lily. "It was my good luck that saved me. I might have remained turning over the dry bones of Eros for the rest of my life. Never mind; I've escaped. I'm alive, and you, my beloved, have done all for me. I suppose Willie told you everything this morning. I would never have spoken to him again if he hadn't gone to you at once."

"Yes, I believe he told me everything that there was to be told," said Minna. "I really felt a little anxious about you when you had left me last evening. You were a little excited, I think."

"Excited! I was excited. You see I'd just heard something."

Lily checked herself suddenly. She felt that the delicate moment in their chat had come. It seemed quite clear that Willie had said nothing to Minna about the singular error into which she, Lily, had fallen in congratulating her friend on loving the wrong man.

"Yes; you told me that you had heard something," said Minna. "What was it that you had heard—that made you speak so warmly about Oswald?"

Lily looked at the toes of her shoes. It was a delicate moment. She thought of two or three excellent exits from her position—would it not be perfectly true, for instance, to say that she had heard that Oswald Clifford meant to stand by Willie in the face of public opinion, and that that fact had made her aware of the nobleness of his heart? She might have said that, or something like that, and so have satisfied Minna; but instead of drawing on her resources of cleverness, she devoted her attention to an exhaustive examination of the toes of her shoes. She almost wished that Willie had told Minna, when he called upon her, of the foolish mistake which she, Lily, had made, and which he had corrected at the earliest possible moment. But Willie had, unfortunately, refrained from making Minna laugh at that time: it was left for Lily to do it now.

And she did it.

She told her the truth—clearly, circumstantially, painfully; and Minna, after looking at her with her lovely gray eyes open very wide, burst into the freshest laugh that Lily had ever heard come from her.

"You shouldn't laugh at me," said Lily. "If I hadn't

spent my best years in the cloister, do you think I should have made so foolish a mistake?"

"If you hadn't spent your life in the cloister you wouldn't be the exquisite thing that you are to-day," said Minna. "You might have been foolish enough to love someone far less worthy of being loved than Willie. It is because you have found out the hollowness of much learning you know wherein lies the true value of man."

"Yes, and of woman," said Lily.

Then the great question of the bridging over of that chasm of two years and three months was discussed. How was it to be done? Lily enquired; but unfortunately her friend knew nothing of the science of chronological pontooning, and she only said, as she had said to someone else, "Wait," though, for that matter, the other person had not taken her advice.

Then Minna said that she had come to the conclusion that it would be well for herself to do a little waiting also. The fact was, she said, that she feared there had been some measure of precipitancy in the suggestion made by Oswald that they should love each other. Could Lily believe it possible that they had really only met four times? Yes, when she and Oswald put their heads together—in Lily's mind's eye their heads were very close together indeed; she had her experience of such discussions—to make the calculation, they found that the sum, worked out as they might work it, resulted only in this figure 4. Now although it was quite possible, under very exceptional circumstances, for two people to come to know each other with great completeness after being together but four times, still she considered it well that she and Oswald should increase the numerical strength of their meetings, even though they might think it impossible to strengthen their mutual affection. In short, she said that she had begged Oswald to refrain from seeing her guardian or from acquainting any of his friends with the fact that she had promised to do her best to adopt his suggestion that they should love each other. If at the end of a few months—say the beginning of the autumn, they remained of the same mind as they were in at the moment of speaking, all would be well; but if, on the other hand, they came to the conclusion—here Minna smiled—and Lily followed her example—that they were not meant to go through the world side by side—well, no harm would be done.

"No harm would be done—except that you should die," said Lily.

"Yes; I believe that I should die," said Minna. "But I'm weak enough to prefer dying without being made the laughing-stock of Weighborough and all the countryside. I'd rather die without anyone—except, of course, you and a few others—knowing how far my vanity extended."

"It would be the happiest moment in the lives of a good many of the Weighborough girls to hear that, after being about to marry Oswald Clifford, you did not marry him; or, as they would be sure to put it, he didn't marry you. But they will not be gratified—I'm certain of that. Heavens! do you fancy that man has been about the world so much as he has without knowing his own mind? If he had been a man who had not an intimate acquaintance with his own mind, would he have been allowed to wander about the world *en garçon*? Not he; he would never have been allowed to go further than Italy—*she* wouldn't have let him. Oh, yes; he knows his own—heart. You don't intend to say anything even to Sir George?"

"I intend to say nothing to him," said Minna. "The truth is I fear Sir George more than anyone else. I fear that if that—that suggestion of Oswald's came to his ears he would insist on spreading it abroad in every direction. He would look on it as meaning the attainment of his dearest aspirations—the County. I only intend telling Gerald. He will keep it a secret."

"I don't suppose that he will be sufficiently interested in the matter to be tempted to talk about it," said Lily. "Your brother takes no heed of anything that takes place on this side of the clouds."

"That is no reason why he should not take an interest in our love," said Minna, very gently; and Lily, the student of metres—the genealogist of Eros to the very root of the family tree on the heavenly mount, felt that she had been dreadfully prosaic, and said so.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON ENTHUSIASMS.

GERALD TALBOT arrived at the Tower the next day. He had been in London it was understood—a good many incidents in his life had to be understood, for he never wrote to Minna, and if he ever communicated with Sir George, the latter kept his correspondence a secret. But once every year he appeared for a month or two at the Tower. This was usually when he had hung his latest works in that Gallery in London where such pictures as he produced find a place, and receive honour from a select circle, within the circumference of which, however, no purchaser lurks.

Gerald Talbot was an undoubted master of the technique of his art. He could paint a dead body with any man living; and he did not disdain to depict the suffering of a living body upon occasions. He thus divided his time pretty equally between the Old Masters and the Morgue. Once, however, he had painted a mummy—it was an unusually homely one.

It was said that no one should stand before one of his Morgue pictures without a vinaigrette.

But, of course, he had a vogue in England; for there are always hundreds of people who believe that the morbid in pictorial art is one of its highest forms, just as there are thousands who believe that there cannot possibly be any merit in a book which amuses them. It is the deadly dull books that are promised immortality by a large number of deadly dull writers, though up to the present it must be confessed that the triumph over Time has been achieved by the books that amuse.

Minna had seen several newspaper criticisms of Gerald's new work, which he had called "The Visitor." It represented the half-nude figure of a dead girl lying in a place of rank grass and gaunt and fantastic trees—a great physician who had seen the picture said that he would be prepared to testify on oath at an inquest that the girl had been precisely four days dead. Looking at the body from among the trees was the ghost of the girl herself. The idea of

the artist was the spirit's revisiting the body from which it had been divided asunder by death. In the distance was a sea with a suggestion of a lovely dawn upon its surface, and through the pearly haze of the sky a star was still visible.

The technical value of the picture was unmistakable; the hues of death—a four-day-old death—were reproduced with appalling accuracy; and the scenery in the midst of which the body lay prolonged the note suggested by the ghastly burden that the rank grasses bore until it was echoed from the faint star. The critics had pronounced the picture one of the most terrible that had ever been hung in that gallery whose walls had encompassed many terrors every May; for the ghostly figure bore an exact resemblance to the dead body, and it seemed equally dead, though scarcely so corrupt.

When he arrived at the Tower, Minna could not but notice a considerable change in Gerald. His eyes were larger and more full of the strange light that had always been in them. It was the light of true genius, his passionate admirers declared, and he seemed quite content to accept their explanation of it. His hair was, Minna noticed, more disordered than ever. It had always been disordered; but Minna was well aware that, in the eyes of a large number of people, the Mane is the clearest indication of the artistic temperament. Then he was more abstracted than ever in his manner, and seemed to take even less interest than the very limited amount which he had taken, in matters outside the empire of art. Minna had really seen very little of him all her life. He had been educated in France and he had never spent more than a fortnight or two of his vacations in England. Then he had entered the studio of a great painter and had only come to the Tower for a month in every summer. The greater portion of this month he had spent locked up in the studio which he had built for himself at a part of the grounds most remote from the mansion: he wanted to remain undisturbed, he explained. When he was not painting he was thinking out a picture, and the intrusion of a visitor was invariably fatal to his train of thought.

Lily Cosway had once hushed Minna's quasi-apologies for Gerald's abstractions, by saying that people who painted such pictures as he had produced were bound to carry about with them the atmosphere of those pictures, or the world would say they were insincere. This was after Gerald had

been generous enough to offer to paint her picture when she died.

Minna was inclined to be generous to everyone in the world on the day of Gerald's arrival; but she found it very difficult to treat her brother's exaggerated affectations merely as ordinary characteristics—suggestions, if not actual indications, of the highly developed artistic temperament. She noticed Sir George looking at him strangely several times during dinner on the evening of his arrival; but Sir George made no attempt at conversation. Minna did; but the attempt was a poor one. She enquired about his new picture; and tried to work up an interest in it. It was hard; for he did not seem to be in the least measure interested in it himself. Yes, it had been fairly well hung, he said. He had taken good care of that; for of course she knew that the management of the Gallery was a carpenter's management: everything depended on the size of the frame. The newspapers had spoken highly of the technique of the picture, Minna suggested. He shrugged his shoulders.

"The critics!" said he, speaking French—he invariably spoke French after giving a shrug. "The critics! My dear child, I hope to heaven that I haven't fallen so low as to be spoken well of by the critics: the critics are the guardians of the mediocre—the conservators of the commonplace."

(Minna had heard that to abuse their critics is the last infirmity of men who are such great failures in life that they cannot be otherwise than conceited.)

She said nothing more on the subject of his pictures, but asked him how long he intended remaining at the Tower.

He gave another shrug, accompanied by a smile.

Who could tell?—a week—a month—a year? He was thinking out a picture. A picture was not like a portrait. The difference between a picture and a portrait is that a picture requires thought, a portrait only requires paint. A picture comes to one as a thief in the night. His design might come to him at once, perhaps not for a year. It was for the artist to wait as patiently as possible. If a man were an artist he could not be altogether patient; if he were a maker of portraits—which is just the opposite—he must have patience or starve. But as for the new picture—well, he trusted that it would come before long. He did not like the country at any time, but he thought that it was

least endurable in the summer. Great heaven! one mass of green in every direction! Could anything be in worse taste? In autumn some passable effects were achieved. But Nature, except in decay, was very crude.

So he went on while dinner lasted. Sir George did not understand French; but he did not seem to be conscious of losing a great deal by his want of knowledge of the language. Minna noticed him looking curiously at Gerald as the latter illuminated his discourse with shrugs and gestures, abhorrent to the average Englishman, and doubly abhorrent to a man who looked on the stolidity of Weighborough as the highest achievement of modern civilization.

Gerald's dinner menu was in keeping with his general eccentricity of manner. He took a scrap of white fish, half a dozen olives, and a biscuit. Wine he never touched. When Lily had long ago become aware of the terms of his regimen, she had declared that he must be sincere and not a mere *poseur*: the man who could habitually dine off olives and biscuits in the midst of the household to which he belonged could not but be sincere.

He left Sir George in the dining-room and accompanied Minna to the drawing-room. Here, after some hesitation, she communicated to him the secret of her heart. He had thrown himself on a couch and had closed his eyes when she began to tell him the sweet story that she had to tell; and when she had ended, he opened his eyes and stared at her. His eyes were piercingly brilliant.

"I wonder how we come to be brother and sister," he remarked, after a pause. "It seems a miracle, does it not?—that you should be acquainting me—with a note of passion in your voice too—of the joy which you experience in looking forward to a long life by the side of an English fox-hunter—I suppose I may take it for granted that he will hunt the fox."

"Why should I not tell you?" she asked. "Does not a sister invariably confide in her brother? And should not we two be bound by closer ties than usually bind a brother and sister?"

"Ties? what ties?" he enquired. He had closed his eyes again.

"We are alone in the world—the last of our family," said she. "We seem to have always stood alone in the world, knowing neither our father nor our mother, having

never heard of the existence of a single relation on either side. Sir George Anderson is no relative of ours."

"Heaven has left us something to be thankful for," he murmured.

"Have you never felt the loneliness of being alone in the world?" she cried, almost piteously.

"I have felt the joy of it," he said, getting into a sitting posture from a recumbent one. "Of all the sources of *ennui* which heaven has scattered within easy reach of most men, the family is the most unendurable. The idea is bourgeois in the extreme. I try to convince myself that I am fond of you, my sister, for a fortnight—sometimes as long even as a month—every year; and I do believe that I succeed—yes, it surprises myself sometimes how well I succeed. I could almost swear sometimes that I am fond of you. You are very sweet. Your face is calm; you are gentle in your manners and you have, I believe, a soul—the soul of an English girl—a soul done in water-colour—very pretty. Yes, I am fonder of you than of anyone in the world, my dear. I have thought of you since I was here last year—yes, once."

This speech meant an extravagance that was exhausting on the part of Gerald; and Minna actually felt cheered by so moderate an outburst. But then she was in a mood to be easily satisfied. For some days she had felt that the world was a very desirable place to live in.

"I am sure that you must feel drawn to me sometimes, Gerald," she said. "And I am also certain that you will like Oswald."

"That is not in the agreement," said he, without unclosing his eyes. "How would it be possible for me to like a fox-hunter—a man who wears a pink coat and glories in that shame! As well talk of my having a fraternal affection for a private soldier in the Guards—the English Guards. No, no, my sweet sister; you will have to rest contented with such affection—if you care to call it affection—as I have for you personally. Keep your fox-hunter away from me and perhaps I may not find him so offensive."

"I did not ask you for any expression of affection on his behalf," said she, coldly. "But I must confess I did think that you would at least try to like the man who will, I trust, one day become your brother."

"Then I will try to like him for your sake, my dear," said

he, with a sickly smile. "For your sake—yes, and to save any further appeals to my fraternal affection. You are a good girl, and you deserve a better fate than to become the mother of a race of fox-hunters."

"When I am satisfied, that is everything," said she. "You are the only one in the house, however, who knows what my position is in regard to Oswald—I felt that I must tell you, my only relation in the world."

"It was so good of you," he murmured.

"But I don't desire Sir George to know of it for some time yet—until, in fact, we are certain of ourselves. Don't you think that I am right, Gerald?"

"There is no doubt on my mind on the subject."

His smile was designed to assure her that no doubt was on his mind because doubt implies thought, and her affairs did not cost him a thought.

She did not expect any outburst of enthusiasm from him in regard to what she had told him; but she certainly expected more than that smile. He had become more grossly and offensively affected during the year that had passed since she had last seen him. What he had said was true: whatever affection there was between them was more formal than substantial. She felt that if he had not been her brother she could scarcely fail to have a contemptuous dislike for him. All that she had recently been reading in respect of the artistic temperament, its vagaries, and the claim to perpetual pardon which was advanced on its behalf, could scarcely keep back from her a feeling which was certainly more nearly akin to contempt than to sisterly affection.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON TORTURES.

THE next day Minna went with her brother through the grounds to his studio. He had made some complaints the previous year regarding the interference of a branch of a tree with the light, and she had promised to see that the branch was removed at the right time. She had carried out

her promise during the winter, and she wished to hear from Gerald if the light was now all that it should be.

He was wearing a loose velvet coat of the most delicate chocolate colour, and it was lined with saffron silk, which appeared also on the turnover of his collar. On his head was a small Florentine cap, also of chocolate velvet. He wore his saffron tie French fashion, with loose-flying ends. He looked as picturesque as it is possible for anyone to look in garments of the present hour; and yet there was nothing *bizarre* about his dress. His long hair streamed away on each side of the little cap, and anyone who might see him could not but feel that he was wearing the best possible covering for the head.

Minna did her best to gratify the delicate perceptions of her brother in regard to colour combinations. She dressed herself as carefully as possible, for she thought it quite likely that Oswald would drop in to lunch, and she did not wish to flaunt before the eyes of the fastidious Gerald any colour that might annihilate the prospect of his being agreeable—or, at any rate, as agreeable as was consistent with a consciousness of deep feeling and a Mission. (One does not expect persons with a mission to be agreeable, any more than one looks for good nature from persons who are conscious of having deep feeling and a Sense of Duty.)

On the whole she thought that she had succeeded very well in her choice; for he made no remark. She was satisfied; she knew that if she had not been successful he would have made some remark—perhaps he might have refused to walk through the grounds with her.

The studio was by no means a flimsy structure. It was built of stone, after the design of one of Sir Thomas Chambers' tea-houses in Kew Gardens, and it contained two rooms—the larger being the painting-room, with windows built up very high. It was furnished, as some artists love furnishing their studios, with good specimens of the art of many lands. When Gerald had built it, he had not discovered how great an error Nature was; and he had an idea of making the Tower his head-quarters, and dealing with the landscape in a new style. He had covered the walls with old fabrics, and upon this background he had hung many "properties" collected in France, Italy, and Egypt. A few chased sword-guards, an old jewelled pistol or two, a couple of Italian stiletos in sheaths of *repoussé* silver, a splendid ivory Cru-

cifix, a little shrine of silver-gilt with an array of saints in Russian enamel—these were among the countless articles that lent a charm to the studio.

Minna alone was entrusted with a key; and few persons beside herself had passed through the carved door since Gerald had been here the previous year. She had remained on the model's chair on the dais which was at one end, while two servants were putting the place in order, so that should Gerald take a fancy to renew his work within its walls, it should be ready for him.

But now when she unlocked the door and went into the studio, he followed her very languidly. He seemed to have lost all interest in the place and its contents. He seated himself in an ebony chair and stared at the ivory Crucifix.

"How did I ever come to possess that?" he said. "It is a wretched thing."

"We all thought it very fine," said Minna. "Look at the face—what a subtle representation of suffering; and yet what a suggestion of Godlike calm there is in every feature! The God triumphant—the Man in agony."

He gave a laugh that startled her—that almost frightened her.

"The artist who carved it had never seen a man die under the torture," said he. "He merely got a man to stand and grimace as his model; and yet in those days—when that thing was carved—people were put to death by torture daily. The artist might have had a hundred models of the final agony; and yet he contented himself with that. Ah, what chances artists had in those days!"

"They availed themselves amply of their opportunities," said Minna. "Think of the hundreds of altar-pieces—the tortures of saints—the agonies of martyrs! I suppose it really was the frequency of the punishments by torture in Italy and Spain that caused so many pictures of the Crucifixion to be painted."

"And yet none exists that is a perfect work of art," said he. "Such a picture has yet to be painted. I have done a good deal of work in the Morgue during the past few years, and I have had a chance of studying the faces of men and women who have died in great agony. Such a study makes one aware of the shortcomings of such artists as the man who produced that Crucifix."

"The study would not suit my temperament," said Minna. "I wonder if it suits yours, Gerald."

"It is the only study that suits my temperament," he replied. "The exquisite tints one finds——"

"Don't let us talk about the tints," she cried. "Death is very terrible!"

He laughed.

"So is love," he said, "and yet you don't shrink from the tints of love—ah, one has come to your face just now. Pink! It does not interest me."

It was her turn to laugh now. He followed her example, but only because he had turned over an old canvas—a lovely bit of woodland in spring.

"Heavens!" he cried, "to think that I—I—myself once painted like that—that." He gave the stretcher a touch with his foot and laughed again.

"It is a very pretty little picture," said Minna.

"I don't want any work of mine more thoroughly damned than to be called a pretty little picture by an English girl," said he, glancing around the walls. He went to one of the Italian stilettoes and, drawing it from its sheath, stabbed the picture with it, and threw the tattered fragment into a corner.

Minna had, however, left the studio the moment before he had cast his eyes around the walls, and so she was unaware of what he had done.

He locked the door with his own key and joined her. She was returning slowly to the Tower.

"How about the branch and your light?" she said. "It seems all right now, though I suppose it scarcely matters if you don't intend doing any work here."

"I didn't say that I would do no work here," said he. "I shall work if the picture comes to me, but I must confess that I am longing for the Morgue. They come to me there fast enough—those pictures. Still—ah, an artist needs to have the patience of a portrait painter!"

"Gerald," said Minna, "take a camp-stool and a little easel and go out and paint a bit of a pure green landscape; it will do you all the good in the world."

He closed his eyes with a little smile.

"Why not suggest my purchasing a camera—a kodak, I believe they call the thing—and dodging about the roads for snap-shots?" said he. "The difference between the kodak artist and your landscape colourist is too small to be appre-

ciated. If people wish to see what a landscape is like, let them take a third-class return-ticket to the nearest landscape, and return to their shops and their back parlours, having gratified their curiosity at a very small cost, even though they should eat sandwiches and leave the paper in which that comestible was wrapped as a pleasing incident of the landscape for the next comer. The sandwich-eaters are the lovers of a pleasing English landscape—blue sky, green trees, a root of primroses depicted with extraordinary fidelity in the foreground, and two children making a daisy-chain at the foot of an oak—that's the picture that will sell by the thousand. Pah! landscape!"

Minna thought that the picture he had described would be an extremely pleasing one, but she laughed at his description as though she thoroughly appreciated it. She was anxious that Gerald should be, as nearly as was possible for him, in a frame of mind to appreciate the many strong points of Oswald Clifford; and she had an idea—in her womanly way, of course—that even an artist of the Morgue likes to have his satire perceived, though, to be sure, the perception of a sister never counts for much.

Lily Cosway dropped in to lunch, and so did Oswald Clifford; but neither seemed to make any impression upon Gerald. He said he thought he remembered Lily.

"Oh, yes; you must remember having been so kind as to promise to paint me," said she.

"That would be impossible," said he. "You are fortunate enough to be in possession of what is known in England as 'a lovely colour'; it is my misfortune not to be able to transmit 'a lovely colour' to canvas."

"Oh, yes; you said you would paint my picture," said she.

"Unconditionally?" said he.

"Well, not quite, but practically so: you said I should only have to die in order to fit myself for a leading place in a picture by you," said Lily.

"Ah, that is intelligible," said he. Then, looking at her through critical, half-closed eyes, he added, "You would, I think, be at your best on the third day after death. Death is the most wonderful refiner of faces."

"Is he?" said she. "It's said that you run Death very close as an artist. You are both in the same line, are you not?"

"The same line?"

"Yes. I've read that life owes most of its horrors to you and Death. What about that Morgue of yours, Mr. Talbot? Is it true that you're setting up a little Morgue of your own, furnished to suit all styles of beauty?"

"We had better go into lunch, I think," said Minna. "We may degenerate into art criticism if we continue on these topics."

"You are quite right," said Oswald. "Art criticism is only one shade more terrible than Death itself."

Oswald could not flatter himself that he had produced any particularly favourable impression upon Gerald, the fact being that after they had shaken hands Gerald ignored his presence altogether. But Minna reflected that, after all, she had no reason to be dissatisfied with the attitude assumed by her brother: it was an attitude of neutrality; and, in regard to Gerald, neutrality was not unsatisfactory: he might easily have made himself aggressive, and when he was aggressive he was insufferable.

Lily, of course, was aggressive so far as Gerald was concerned, but she was so pretty a little Philistine that Gerald, who had, perhaps, some scrap of manhood hidden away beneath the *débris* of an artistic temperament, could not be seriously offended by her impertinences. Several of the most noteworthy of the Chosen People had now and again found an attractive Philistine—usually female. Gerald's toleration of Lily was, he believed, graceful. He could be tolerant when he pleased, he assured her, when she once expressed to him her appreciation of his kindness in allowing her to babble away. Yes, he could be tolerant: had he not walked with Minna past a bed of peonies?"

But before lunch was over, Oswald, whose experience of men and artists was pretty wide, had succeeded in interesting Gerald Talbot. He had made strenuous efforts with that intent—was he not Minna's brother?—and he was at last rewarded. The topic had a bearing upon Burmese crucifixions of robbers on wayside trees, and Gerald rose to it in a moment. Minna rose also—from the table—with Lily, leaving the men over their savoury morsel.

In the drawing-room Minna sat down to the piano, and began interpreting her sense of satisfaction at the success which had attended the tactics of Oswald in regard to her brother.

She continued expressing herself through her favourite medium, not noticing that her friend Lily was no longer reading the magazine at which she had settled down on a sofa on entering the room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON ARCADY.

"MUSIC, my dear Minna, may be the food of love, but it's quite possible to kill love by overfeeding," said Lily at last, coming behind her.

"I quite forgot myself," said Minna with a laugh as she rose.

"And me too," said Lily.

"And you too—and all the world except——"

"Oh, he is all the world to you, my dear. If you remember him, you have discharged the duties of your vocation. I want you to help me in abusing that horrid old Colonel Passmore."

"I'm always ready to sympathize with my friends. But I really thought that Colonel Passmore was abused and done for."

"Nothing of the sort—we have been doing it in deadly earnest for the past few days, Willie and I, but we really both agreed last night that we haven't gone below the surface yet; we've been quite superficial in our abuse of him."

"And you desire to apply to me for help in your extremity?"

"That's it. Isn't it quite infamous that he should have it in his power to interfere with our happiness?"

"Quite; but how is he doing that?"

"Didn't I tell you long ago that he declines to give his consent to our being married until Willie is twenty-five?"

"Oh, yes, you told me that. But it will be out of his power to withhold his consent afterwards."

"Of course; but in the mean time . . . oh, Minna, doesn't it seem a terrible waste of time? . . . two years and three months . . ."

"It was two years and three months, some days ago—it is less now."

"Oh, of course, if you choose to make fun of us——"

"But I don't. My dear child, I think that it's quite delightful to see how perfectly you carry out your father's precept regarding being natural, and saying just what you feel. For my part, I don't see that there's anything except what is good and womanly and true to nature in your anxiety to be married without delay."

"Why shouldn't we wish to be married at once to make sure of each other?"

Minna was not ungenerous enough to remind her that she had talked some time before of waiting in order to have this surety.

She merely smiled, saying—

"There was a philosopher once, who, at the end of a long life, declared that if he had his life to lead over again, and were offered his choice between the Truth and the Pursuit of Truth, he would choose the latter."

"He was a philosopher, and a philosopher, a friend of Willie's—one Skilleter of Magdalen—has defined as a man who fancies he has got close to Wisdom when he has looked at her through a telescope. You don't mean to say that you think that looking forward to marriage is better than being married?"

"I don't mean to say anything whatever on so wonderful a subject. But I think that any girl who loves a man so dearly as to wish to marry him at the end of, say, two years and three months—less some days—is only true to herself and her love if she is anxious to marry him in two days, or, for that matter, two hours. Marriage is not something to run away from."

"And if it will be a good thing in two years, surely it will be a better thing in two days, when we're both so young and so full of the idea of being married. I don't say that marriage is like salmon—that it spoils with time; but . . . isn't Colonel Passmore a brute?"

"He is possibly the most contemptible of the brute creation."

"It isn't as if it would be taking anything out of his pocket. He has only to give his consent, and we should be married in—well, a month. Willie was wondering if we mightn't dispense with his consent altogether; but we agreed that that wouldn't do at all."

"I think you were right there."

"You see we've no money to start with, and Willie's allowance wouldn't be nearly enough for us."

"Especially if he insists on contributing to the support of the families of shipwrecked sailors."

"Who, by the way, have made no attempt to refund the money which he advanced. But he says he wouldn't take it now; he meant it as a gift. He was thinking about borrowing a few thousand pounds—he knows a Mr. Ahaseueris who was very obliging to the undergrads at his college; he took sometimes as moderate a rate as thirty per cent., but in such cases they had to buy some dozens of boxes of cigars and a hundred patent braces."

"I hope he gave up the idea of Mr. Ahaseueris."

"Oh, dear, yes; a clause in the will—that unfortunate will—says that if a single pound is raised on the security of the property the bulk of it is to go to the County Hospital to build a new wing! Just think of the iniquity of that: a new wing! We agreed that that dreadful thing must be averted at any sacrifice."

"I'm afraid there's no way out of your difficulty except by waiting. After all——"

"No, don't say it. I implore of you, Minna, not to say that, after all, two years can't be considered a long space of time. I've heard nothing but that from even the most sympathetic enquirers. Well, well! After all, it's better waiting for a certainty than waiting on chance, as so many girls—poor things!—are compelled to do."

At this point, and before Minna could express in fitting terms her sympathetic condolence with the poor things who are forced, through no will of their own, to spend their lives waiting "on chance," as Lily put it, Oswald and Gerald entered.

"I never was so greatly interested in all my life," said the latter. "There must be many chances for a painter in Burmah when the country is in an unsettled condition. The crucifixions are carried out, Minna, upon such trees as lend themselves to——"

"Oh, please spare us the details," cried Minna. "The idea of the suffering of anything created by God is terrible to me."

"But when they suffer that art may be enlarged," said Gerald, with a smile.

"The horror is not abated," said Minna.

"Suffering that is ennobled by art——"

"Is not the less suffering to the poor wretches."

"What art hath cleansed that call not common or unclean," said Gerald, leaving the room.

"I wonder from whom he heard that," whispered Lily. She had a suspicion of altered texts and inverted proverbs. Most of them had been traced back to the French, the remainder were crystallized nonsense.

"He had long ago a large acquaintance with the Bible," said Minna. "But I fancy he must reverently have fallen under other influences."

"He is what Mr. Clifford would call a type, I suppose," said Lily. "Mr. Clifford is fond of types and phases—he once called me a phase."

"That proves how fond I am of at least one phase," said he, taking her hand and kneeling on one knee while he pressed it to his lips with a suspicion of the swagger of Eighteenth Century gallantry.

"Sir, I protest that I am vastly obleeged," said Lily, sinking in a courtesy. "Observe, Nineteenth Century people, that I pronounce the word 'obleeged'—we always do it in the Eighteenth Century," she added.

"Yes, my Lilyflower—I hope you will allow me to call you by that name——"

"Minna originated it, but there's no copyright in it."

"Then, my Lilyflower, let me assure you that I'm fond of you—if Minna would only run away and leave us, I'd tell you exactly how fond of you I am."

"Yes; you could do that—you could tell me exactly how fond of me you are; but would you also undertake to tell me exactly how fond you are of Minna?"

He dropped her hand and hung his head.

Minna laughed, lying back on the cushions of the couch on which she was sitting.

"No, you will give me no assurance on that point, therefore I fly," cried Lily.

"What, must you go?" cried Minna and Oswald in one breath—alas! there was no whisper of regret in either of the voices that mingled in that enquiry.

Lily stood in the centre of the room and laughed with exceeding prettiness.

"Yes," she said. "I must go." Then she looked, first at Minna, then at Oswald, but without the slightest expres-

sion or suggestion on her face. "Yes," she whispered. "I must go: I, too, have lived in Arcady."

"There is nothing so sweet in the world," said Minna, when Lily had tripped out of the room.

"She is the sweetest thing that breathes," said he. "She is quite as charming as if she were uneducated."

"Her father took care of that," said Minna. "He saw how apt she was in acquiring knowledge, and therefore he daily insisted on her being natural—on her telling him all her phases of thought—of emotion. That course of discipline neutralized the effect of her store of learning. But about Gerald—I hope you don't think him too full of affections."

"I almost think I like him," said Oswald. "At any rate I know that I like you."

She withdrew her hand beyond his reach.

"I am his sister," she said. "I want you to like him."

"I like him far better than you seem to think it possible that I could," said he. "He seems affected: he is nothing of the sort. He is thoroughly sincere in his devotion to his art. He sees things a little queerly, we think; but what man ever accomplished a great work in the world who did not look at things with different eyes from the rest of the world?"

"But with Gerald—do you think that he has any real capacity? Will he ever be able to persuade people that he is a great painter?"

"I have seen one or two of his paintings in Paris—they were not quite so ghastly as his recent adventures in colour seem to be; but undoubtedly they contained qualities that showed him to be a great master of the technique of his art."

"But his imagination?"

"Ah! it is in the matter of imagination that he is impossible. He allows himself to be swayed by it altogether, and that is where, I believe, he makes a mistake. It carries him away, and he is quite content to trust to its sole guidance. I told him just now exactly what my impression was."

"And he listened to you?"

"With a little sneer at first. I saw with satisfaction, however, that even this little sneer passed away. Oh, yes, we got on very well together. He was good enough to tell

me that I bore an extraordinary likeness to one Théophile Lacour, a French Royalist who was broken on the wheel at the Revolution. His portrait by David is still in existence."

"Then Monsieur Théophile Lacour must have been a singularly handsome man," said Minna, putting out her hand for him to play with. He had accepted her previous withdrawal of it as a sign that she wished him to give her an unprejudiced opinion respecting her brother, and he had spoken accordingly. He now accepted her hand as an indication that she was satisfied with what he had said.

He was not long satisfied with her hand.

In less than half an hour Gerald re-entered the room. His face was paler even than usual.

"It has come," he said quietly, and sank into a chair, closing his eyes.

There was a pause of considerable duration before Minna said—

"What has come?"

There was another pause of equal length before he murmured—

"The picture."

"I'm so glad!" cried Minna. "I was hoping it would come while you were with us. And you can paint it here?"

"Part of it—the greater part of it," said he. He had not opened his eyes nor had he stirred from where he had flung himself in the chair. There was a silence before he drew a long breath and his eyes unclosed: they were lamps. He turned their piercing light upon Oswald.

"You were not talking nonsense after lunch," he said. "You were not talking the nonsense that all critics talk. You understand. The critic does not understand. A picture has come to me—an inspiration."

"Not making too great demands upon the imagination?" said Oswald, interrogatively.

"Making no demands whatever upon it," he replied, quickly—almost fiercely.

"And you are going to paint it?" said Oswald. "I'm glad to hear that. Have I converted you?"

"I do not say that you have," replied Gerald, slowly. "I dare not say that you have converted me. But I am

about to try the experiment that you suggested. You are not a fool. You know that the imagination is but another word for the soul in a work of art."

"If you allow me," said Oswald, "I would suggest that the imagination in an artist is the reflection of his soul."

"An excellent definition," said Gerald. "I accept it readily. The artist's soul is reflected on the clear surface of his art, and that reflection men call imagination."

"Even I can understand that," laughed Minna.

She could: it was her lover who had suggested the original idea.

"But as the soul can only be controlled with difficulty, so the imagination is—you said it—likely to sway the artist overmuch," said Gerald. "Well, the idea of the picture that has come to me just now is one in which the deceitful imagination will have little possibility of being reflected. It will really be little more than a portrait. I told you how close a resemblance you bear to the portrait of Théophile Lacour by David. My picture will be 'The Genius of France looking on at the Death of Théophile Lacour.' You will sit to me for the male figure; Minna will be my model for the Genius of France."

There was a silence in the room.

What was the thought that flashed across the mind of Minna at the same instant that it flashed across the mind of her lover?

What a chance of bringing them together almost daily!

"I'll sit for you with the greatest pleasure in the world," cried Oswald.

"And of course you'll be my model, too?" said Gerald, turning to his sister.

She laughed.

"Why do you say 'of course'?" she asked.

He smiled.

"Because I have looked into the faces of a good many women who died for love," he replied.

"What has that got to say to the 'of course'?"

"What were we talking about just now? The Soul and the Imagination? Ah, the Man is the Soul and the Woman is his reflection. You will be one of our studio party, my dear sister. Great heaven! What a compliment I am paying to the Genius of France!"

Minna laughed more uneasily than before: there was a

question of drapery. She was uncertain what was the exact costume affected by the Genius of France. Would it be very spiritual? Would it be very French? She knew that artists were sometimes very terrible in this direction.

"We shall see later on," said she.

"I will not urge it upon you," said her brother. "After all, I can find a thousand models for the Genius of France, but there is only one who would do for Théophile Lacour."

"I say 'of course,' also in regard to your coming," laughed Oswald. "I see the picture already before me. But Lacour was broken on the wheel? Do you expect me to be the model for the suffering as well?"

"Only for the features," said Gerald.

"And therefore, after all, you will not be able to finish the picture in England," said Minna.

"That is pretty certain," replied her brother. "I suppose I shall find myself sketching in the Morgue as usual."

"Unless," said Oswald, after a moment's pause, "unless you obtain the services of a young lady amateur to play Mascagni's Intermezzo for an hour on her violin. At the end of an hour I believe that you will find on my features an expression of greater agony than Lacour could have suffered. The production of 'Cavalleria' introduced a new crime into England—Intermezzocide."

"Let us stroll across to the studio now and talk about the composition," said Gerald, rising with a degree of alertness that an hour or two before one would have thought impossible for him to assume.

He went out through the French window, not waiting even to find his Florentine cap.

"My beloved," whispered Oswald, "isn't the picture idea a happy inspiration?"

"Is it?" said she.

"Can any sane person question the fact?" he cried. "Every day for—well, I hope that your brother is not a rapid painter. Oh, I will protest against his scamping his work so far as I am concerned."

They followed Gerald on to the studio.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON MISSIONS.

THE picture was commenced. It was not a mood that was upon Gerald, but a fever. It would have been impossible for anyone to watch him painting and not become impressed with the fact that he believed himself to have a Mission. He had no thought for anything but his picture during this week. Before the first six sittings were over Oswald felt that, when he had talked of an artist's putting his soul into his work, he had referred to what was literally a possibility, and not a mere figure of speech. Gerald became more meagre than ever as the work progressed. The light in his eyes waxed more strangely brilliant. It seemed as if that transmigration of the artist's soul was about to be accomplished—it seemed as if, when the picture should be finished, it would be the tenement of the man's soul. Certainly Oswald could not conceive of any man working as Gerald was working and surviving the accomplishment of his purpose.

He had all the impatience—the intolerance of the Missioner; and Oswald soon came to sympathise with the wives and sisters of those prophets of the past who had found that the burden laid upon them of nurturing the prophets' bodies was too grievous to be borne. Clearly those of the brotherhood who had gone out into the wilderness, and had catered for themselves, making the locust their staple article of diet, had done well, if not for themselves, at any rate for their womenfolk. The Mission of the Missioner is undoubtedly difficult, but what about the Mission of the Missioner's wife or sister?

And yet few Missioners have been slain by their wives or sisters. It is usually the other way. From the wife of Ezekiel, who died in order to provide him with the subject of a parable that no one remembers, down to "brave Jeannie," who spent her life mending a Scotch prophet's breeks, and died at last through keeping a diary, the Missioners' wives have had a hard time of it.

If Oswald appeared at the studio a few minutes late he

found Gerald pacing the floor with his hair more wild even than usual, while Minna was doing her best to be cheerful in the garden. They were all living in the centre of a kind of artistic blizzard during this week; the condition of affairs would have been too preposterous to be endured had it not been that the conditions under which the work had been begun—they had been foreseen by both Minna and Oswald—remained unchanged. The lovers were together for some hours every day. They felt that they would be ready to submit to a great deal for such a recompense.

Some days were spent over the general design of the picture; on the question of the draping of the Genius of France upon which Minna had made up her mind to be firm, was not so much as hinted at by her brother. He decided, after numerous posings and groupings and sketches, that the Genius of France was not likely to be aggressive at the special dramatic moment which he purposed illustrating—indeed, as Oswald remarked in a softer tone to her, the Genius of France was rarely aggressive except in Exhibition years. Consequently the model for this Abstraction was not to be called in during the earlier stages of the picture. It was understood that she was to appear between two pillars of the prison where the man in whom she was so greatly interested was being tortured.

Oswald, with his hair artistically dishevelled, and wearing a shirt so loose at the throat as to expose a portion of his chest, was posed on a large chair, the back of which had been furnished with a heavy wooden frame to suggest the fatal wheel. A rope was passed loosely over his wrists at first, and one day over his ankles to suggest the bondage of Théophile Lacour. It was a trifle tiresome, holding his arms in so constrained a position for an hour at a stretch, Oswald explained on the day when he had sat for the arms, and Gerald had become impatient when a rest had been suggested.

"I do not call out for a rest," said Gerald, "and I do all the working. Surely any man can sit in a chair for three or four hours without feeling fatigue."

But here Minna interfered and said that Gerald had no right to treat his guest as he would a paid model. She could not allow Oswald to sit in that constrained posture for more than an hour at a time; and besides, lunch was nearly ready.

"Lunch! Lunch!" cried the painter, flinging down the rope that bound Oswald to the chair. "Lunch! You think

of nothing but eating and drinking, and driving, and your roses, and your chances of kissing—oh, lunch!"

Oswald tried to say a few words of sympathy in response to this outburst—one of countless outbursts in which the painter indulged almost daily—for Oswald actually did sympathise with the man who was painting his soul away. But Gerald would not accept sympathy, and Oswald went into the dressing-room to brush his hair, and left the studio with Minna.

"It is so good of you to stand all this," said Minna.

"Good, my beloved?" said he. "These days are the pleasantest of my life. Only—I'll tell you what I've been thinking: it's said that a man learns more during a week in a fo's'le than he could possibly learn during a year in the world; now, it's my opinion that two people together in a studio as we have been, come to know more of each other in a week than they could in a year elsewhere."

"I believe that you are quite right," said she, scarcely apprehending the exact force of his words.

"I thought you would," said he. "Then why should not the period of my probation be shortened?"

She laughed and flushed, but made no reply, unless the laugh and the flush might be susceptible of interpretation.

But after lunch, when they had strolled into the drawing-room, she put her hands upon his shoulders, saying—

"Oswald, I will marry you in August"—the month of June was just half over.

"My darling—my darling—my best beloved!"

His arms were about her. Her head was on his shoulder.

This was when the sittings for the picture had lasted for a day or two over the week.

But she had something else to say to him.

"Only this morning, Oswald, a thought came to me; I felt that I should tell you what it was, and be guided by you."

"What guide should I be, compared with your own feeling—the feeling of your own true heart?"

"I will be guided always by you, my dearest. The fact is that it occurred to me that I might get whatever little fortune is in the hands of my guardian—I really don't know how much it amounts to, but it must be some thousands of pounds—and transfer it to Lily to enable her and Willie to be independent of that foolish old man who stands in the

way of their marriage. Why should they have to wait so long when a few thousand pounds would make them independent? Of course the money would be repaid when Willie came of age."

"What a splendid idea!" said he. "Don't fancy for a moment that I would counsel you to stay your hand or your own sweet heart in any matter—much less a matter referring only to money. All the money you might bring to me when we are married would mean nothing to me. I was wise enough to foresee how the agricultural question was going to develop: so as long ago as six years I sold every farm that was saleable on the property that I inherited. I got for them about double what I could get to-day; and when I grew tired of receiving two or three per cent. interest on the money, I went all over the world in search of investments. I have done very well in this way, better even than if I had placed myself unreservedly in the hands of an Outside Broker; and even if I hadn't put ten thousand pounds into the Mount Warrall mine I should be receiving a good income from my other ventures to-day. But the Mount Warrall mine has made us all wealthy. Now it is your turn to invest. My dearest, don't hesitate for a moment."

"I was hoping you would not object. I felt that it was due to you to tell you what my idea was before making any move in the matter. I am all yours, yours, Oswald—my heart, my soul, my love, my life!"

He made her no answer, unless . . .

As she dressed for dinner that night she felt deliriously happy. She had had joyous moments in her life; but now she seemed to be living in an atmosphere of happiness—she seemed to be drinking deep draughts of it at every breath. She had sailed into a haven of joy and had anchored there. She had reached an island of peace—a Valley of Ailion. Every night when she went to sleep with the recollection of his kisses on her lips it was with the feeling that in a few more hours he would be beside her again. And then, in addition, the supreme thought encompassed her: in less than two months she would be by his side for ever and for ever.

The very thought of her happiness forced the tears from her eyes. It seemed too great to come to any human being.

And so it was. But now she felt sure of herself—sure of

her own heart—ah, had she ever been otherwise than sure of it? She felt sure of him—had she ever doubted him? She did not care now how widely Sir George might publish the news which she felt certain he would regard as a personal matter—a sort of link binding him to the County. She would have to ask him all about her money, and he could have no objection to tell all that there was to be told about it. Leaving out of the question altogether her project in regard to Lily and her lover, it was, she felt, time that she learned what was the exact amount of her fortune. She knew that it must amount to some thousands of pounds, for the allowance made to her by her guardian was, as has already been stated, large. It was a matter of conscience with him, he declared, that she should receive an ample allowance. He had his religious scruples. (The religious scruples that prevailed among the Weighborough mercantile class were rather more frequently exercised in retaining other people's money.)

After dinner, when the dessert was on the table and the servants had withdrawn, she lost no moment in starting the subject.

"I should like you to tell me what money I have, Sir George," said she.

"Money! She talks of money!" cried Gerald, rising from the table and leaving the room with an exclamation of scorn that is only heard in one quarter of Paris.

Minna laughed. It was so like Gerald.

"You want to know what money you have in hand, my dear?" said Sir George. "How can I tell you that? I gave you a cheque for the housekeeper on the first of the month."

"I don't mean that," she said. "I'm anxious to know what is the amount of the fortune which you told me years ago came to me from my father."

He smiled.

"You have become suddenly mercenary, Minna," said he, and his smile became one of gentle reproof—gentle, because we mustn't be too hard upon girls who know nothing whatever about great business transactions.

"Oh, no," she said, "I have not become mercenary suddenly—you may remember that I put almost the same question to you long ago—when I left school."

"And I'm sure I gave you a satisfactory reply," said he.

"You said that I should know all when it was necessary for me to know all, and that meantime I should have a liberal allowance."

"And has not your allowance been liberal, Minna?"

"It has indeed; but——"

"If you want it increased, you have only to suggest the amount—anything in reason——"

"You are very good—you have always been very good to me, and I'm sure that I should be very happy to go on as we have been, were it not that—that—well, that other interests beside mine have come forward for consideration."

"Other interests? What can you possibly mean, my child?"

Minna looked at the painting on her dessert plate. All her fluency had vanished.

"I have asked you what other interests, do you imagine, are now associated with yours?" said Sir George.

But still she did not speak for some time.

"It has only been settled to-day—a few hours ago," she said at last. "If we had been quite sure of ourselves before we should, of course, have told you."

"What do you say is settled? You are far from lucid, Minna," said he.

"Mr. Oswald Clifford has asked me to marry him and I have given him my promise," said she.

"Great God!" cried Sir George. "You don't tell me that you—you—have engaged yourself to marry him?"

"That is what I have told you."

He had risen from his chair and was walking up and down the room in a plainly excited condition.

After taking several turns of the room, he went to a window and gazed out upon the parterres of roses in the garden.

"Will you kindly give me an answer to my question, Sir George?" she said. "You are a business man: the question that I have asked of you is purely a business one. Surely you can answer it without difficulty."

"That is nothing," he said. "It is only a question of money—securities—but the other matter . . ."

He resumed his pacing of the room. She saw that his lips were moving. Was he praying?

"I quite agree with you," she said, after a pause. "Money is nothing in comparison with . . . Why should I not marry Oswald Clifford?"

"Why? Why? Are you sure of his character, my dear? Young women situated as you are cannot be too careful. I feel my responsibility too, I can assure you."

"Responsibility to whom?"

"To my God, my child."

"You have always treated me with consideration. Have you heard anything against Oswald Clifford? . . . No, no, don't answer me." She had sprung suddenly from her chair. The action startled him greatly. "Don't answer me. I know Oswald Clifford; I love him. I don't care whether or not you have heard anything respecting his character. I have got beyond so small a consideration as his character. I will marry him, even though he were as bad as I know him to be good."

"This is very sad. I feel that I am responsible—yes, in a measure—for what has occurred—for your infatuation."

"I alone am responsible, if there is any question of responsibility in the matter," said she. "Don't trouble yourself, Sir George. I daresay that Oswald will write to you for an interview. You can explain all to him that you know regarding his character, and also my money. You will find him a business man, I can promise you."

She went toward the door.

"Wait," said he.

She stood with her hand on the handle of the door.

"Why should I wait? The coffee will be in the drawing-room."

"Very well," said he. "Go."

She went to the drawing-room.

What could he mean? she wondered. What could he mean by assuming an attitude that made suspicion unavoidable? What did he suggest by that exclamation which he had given the moment she told him of her promise to marry Oswald Clifford?

He knew nothing whatever against Oswald personally—of that she was convinced, not because of her unlimited belief in the goodness of Oswald, but because she had detected the note of insincerity in his references to her lover. His references to Oswald were as manifestly insincere as his expression of responsibility to his God.

There was something behind his words—something upon which he had not touched.

What was it?

The light had died out of the summer sky that had held the light for long. Only in the distance—over the trees that surrounded the Court—there was a little cloud that had drifted round from the west with a touch of light about its edges. It suggested a clump of purple heather, with here and there a pink blossom. She watched it until it faded away.

What was it that she felt to be behind his words?

He was behind her. He had entered the room silently. A servant followed and lit half a dozen candles.

“What have you been thinking about, Minna?” Sir George enquired, in a tone of plaintive kindness.

“I have been asking myself what it is that is behind your words—your suggestions,” she replied.

“Don’t seek to know,” said he, solemnly.

“I wonder how we have lived in the same house for so long without your knowing something about me,” said she, with a laugh.

“Don’t laugh—for God’s sake don’t laugh,” said he, not plaintively but piteously.

She looked at him.

“Tell me everything you may have to tell me,” she cried. “Your mystery may be an air-bubble.”

“An air-bubble! an air-bubble! Minna, you must give up this notion of marriage.”

She laughed. She actually found his suggestion ludicrous.

“Good-night, I’m going to bed,” she said.

“You think that it is impossible for you to give up the idea of marrying this Mr. Clifford?” said he.

“Good-night.” She had half opened the door; the light from the hall lamp was about her.

“Wait for a minute, my child,” said he, quietly.

She returned and stood before him.

“I’m afraid that you don’t quite understand me yet, Sir George,” said she, smiling—was it defiantly?—at him.

“Sit down, Minna, my child. You have been a good girl. God moves in a mysterious way.”

The theology was sound—the sequence was scarcely so apparent, she thought.

“I think I know something of you,” he continued, after a pause of a few seconds. “I know that if I were to swear to you that I am acquainted with some grave reason against

your marriage, you would not be satisfied—you would force me to tell you all that was in my power to tell."

"I would," said she. "I would, indeed; and then I would marry Oswald Clifford."

"You will never do that, if you are the woman I know you to be."

"I love him, and——"

"That's it—that's it; you love him, and therefore you'll never marry him."

"Man, tell me what you mean—all—all—all! You called me a woman this moment. Tell me all that there is to be told."

"You have no pity. You will not spare me."

"All—all—all!"

"For God's sake spare yourself."

"All!"

"I have it here. I brought it out of the box where it has lain for years . . . an old newspaper . . . there is the paragraph . . . it refers to the death of your father. God pity you."

She took the newspaper from him. It was dusty. She blew the dust off it, and read the paragraph he pointed out to her. The puzzled expression which was on her face when she began to read did not leave it until she had almost come to the end; then it vanished utterly.

The paper dropped from her hand. She stared at him—stared at him—stared at him—was she never going to take her eyes off him?

"God pity you!" he murmured.

"My father . . . my father . . . then I am his daughter . . . what is the curse? . . . unto the third and fourth generations . . . good-night, Sir George . . . it is so dark."

And then she laughed.

Her laugh rang through the house.

But Sir George had his arms around her before she fell.

The servants brought restoratives.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON TRANSFIGURATIONS.

"MY sister—my sweet sister! Now I know indeed that you are the best of sisters—that you have something of my feeling for the art that ennobles the world. That expression! An agony of grief is expressed in every line of your face at this minute—a passion of suffering, with a beautiful haunting terror in your eyes! You have at last awakened to a sense of what is due to the picture. You have got rid altogether of that expression of school-girl joy which irritated me."

"I have—I have."

"That is the truth: a transfiguration has been accomplished during the night. I tell you it is a complete transfiguration. Thank God! Thank God! Oh, keep that expression—it suggests a shudder. Ah, my God! if I can only reproduce it, what a picture mine will be! I could not look at you before—the Genius of France, when watching the death of one of her beloved sons, could not be supposed to have the jubilant air of an English milkmaid. But now—now—oh, you are as beautiful as the Madonna at the foot of the Cross—Andrea's."

"There I shall be—at the foot of the Cross—while I live. I shall cling about the feet of the Christ that suffered. Strength—strength—all I implore is strength to remain firm—firm against the temptation of keeping silent."

"There's too much passion now in your face. I don't want that element emphasized. Grief, with a suspicion of indignation—you understand?"

"Oh, Gerald, don't talk to me about shades of expression at this moment. Do you know so little about the expression of your art as to be unable to perceive that I am in such a condition now as would make me welcome death? Have you no feeling?"

"No feeling? I have nothing but feeling—feeling for my art. But you care nothing for it. You will not even retain your original expression of sorrow—you vary it every moment. One instant the terror is shining out from your

eyes, the next all terror has vanished, and despair has taken its place; and now—well, that expression of scorn—indignation, as I said, is not wholly incongruous. But will you be able to retain it?"

"You need not doubt me, Gerald. You will have many opportunities of reproducing in your pictures the agony of a woman who is chained to life while longing hourly for death. Tell me, Gerald, have you really never heard anything regarding our father and mother?"

"Oh, don't let us fall into the maudlin domestic stage, my sister. Father—mother—what are they to me? I have my work to do in the world."

"You have never had any desire to hear where our father died—how he died?"

"Not the remotest shadow of a desire. I have none even now; your attempts to stimulate my curiosity have failed. Now what on earth can be keeping Clifford? Oh, he cares as little as you do for my work—less; for he never suggests the agony of the dying man in his face. He looks smilingly unruffled, because he feels that he is near you."

"After to-day he will never be near me. We part to-day!"

"What?—part?—for how long?"

"For ever—for ever—for ever!"

"Thank God for that! Thank God for that! If his face is susceptible of any expression, it will suggest to-day all that will serve my purpose for this picture. Why is he not here?"

"It's not time yet. I wrote to him this morning telling him that I must meet him alone here. You will have to give us half an hour alone."

"What a suggestion! I can give you no half-hour alone. Every minute is of value in the painting of the picture. You are most unreasonable, Minna."

"Am I? But I must have the half-hour with Oswald. Listen to me, Gerald. You spoke just now of the value of the expression that is on my features. Well, I am going to make Oswald acquainted with the cause of my grief—my agony."

"You shall have your half-hour. Say no more. If you can impart to him your expression—that which is on your face at the present moment—I shall certainly not grudge you your half-hour."

"I am going to say good-bye to him for ever."

"He must have the expression of physical pain emphasized. Yours is too delicate—too subtle to be effective on the man's face. I want the expression which you said you perceived on the features of the Crucifix—the Man's manhood—that is, the God in the Man, triumphing over the horrible physical pain. The signs of the conflict must be stamped upon his features. You understand?"

"Ah, Gerald—yes. I understand—I understand. He is here. You will leave us together?"

"Half an hour, you said?"

Gerald threw open the studio door, and Oswald entered. He gave a start when he was face to face with Minna, taking her hand.

"Half an hour," said Gerald, leaving the studio.

When the door was shut they looked at each other—the two who remained—long—earnestly.

Then she broke down. She fell upon her knees on the floor, and her body was shaken with sobs as she buried her face in the cushion of the chair.

He was beside her in a moment, his arms about her shoulders.

"My dearest—my own love—what has happened? Nothing can have happened of sufficient importance to overcome you. Minna, Minna, can it be anything worth a sob when I am with you?"

But still she lay on the ground in her tears—the first that she had shed since the blow had fallen on her the previous night. They were so great a relief to her, she could not relinquish them.

Perhaps he had an instinct of this.

He walked across the studio to another chair, and, seating himself, watched her.

"What can have occurred to make that needful?" was the question which came to him, as the sobs sounded through the silence of the place.

She was not the sort of girl who looks to find a solace in tears for an ordinary discomfort of the moment. She was, he knew, self-contained—not given to express her feelings after the manner of an ordinary girl; so that he could not but perceive that something past the common had occurred. The few lines that he had received from her in the morning had suggested to him nothing of this sort.

He could not bear the suspense any longer. He rose and went back to her. He knelt down beside her and put his hand upon her head—caressingly.

At its touch she raised her head—her tearful eyes looked wonderingly into his face. Then his arms went about her, and his face was wet with the tears that streamed down hers.

She struggled to her feet.

“That is the last—the last,” she said—a sob choked her final word. “Ah, God, is this the answer to the prayer for strength which my soul has been uttering all through the long tearless night?”

“My beloved, I am with you. Can anything worth a tear have happened?” he asked.

She looked at him; her eyes were tearless now. But what grief was in their depths!

There was a silence. She was praying, not that the cup might pass from her, but that she might have strength to drink of it.

“Something has happened,” she was able to say at last. “Something—I cannot tell you what it is, but it is enough to—to—create a gulf between us. This is the last time that we shall be together until we die.”

He looked at her and laughed—as the man laughs who fancies that he is strong enough to grapple with and to strangle Fate.

She shuddered.

“For God’s sake don’t laugh in that way,” she cried, piteously.

Her words were nothing to him. He laughed again.

She covered her face with her hands. Then he went to her.

“My beloved! I laugh,” he said, “because I know that there is no power strong enough to separate us now. Because I know that Death and Hell are not strong enough to prevail against our love. What is this thing that has happened? Is it stronger than Death?”

“Stronger than Death? Ah, would to God that it were only Death that we had to contend with, Oswald,” said she.

“What is it? Tell me all, my beloved.”

“Nothing! I can tell you nothing. I can only tell you that I love you better now than I ever did, and that in a few minutes we shall have parted for ever.”

"You talk as if it was in our power to part—as if it was the most ordinary incident of our life. But I know how we love."

"Do not say anything about love. It is because I love you better than anything in the world we must part."

"Tell me all, my love."

"I can tell you nothing. If you have ever loved me—and I have never had a doubt of you for a moment—you will trust me in this matter—you will not question me."

"I love you—I trust you, my darling; but I deny your right to tell me that the hour has come for us to part, when only a few hours ago—yesterday afternoon—you were in my arms, and gave me your promise to marry me in less than two months."

"I take it back—I take back that promise. Oh, Oswald, if you knew all—if you knew all!"

"That is what I mean to know—all—all!"

"I cannot tell you—it is too horrible. If I did not love you as I do, I would marry you to-morrow. It is, I tell you again, because I love you that I am ready to part from you and wait for Death in some corner of the world."

He was holding both her hands in his own—tightly—as he kept his eyes fixed upon her face. So he stood for more than a minute after she had spoken. Then he suddenly let her hands fall. They fell—loosely—limply—as a dead body falls into the sea.

"My God! my God! she means it!" he cried as the agony of the moment came upon him.

He walked away from her. He could not see how, the moment that he turned, she took an irresolute step toward him, stretching out her hands to him—imploping him in that mute moment to return to her, to be enfolded in her arms. Her irresolution lasted only for that one instant, however; then she struck her hands together and staggered to the wall. She looked up in a moment, and her eyes met another Face of agony. The Face of the Divine Figure on the ivory cross that hung on the background of old Italian tapestry. She clutched the Crucifix, and pressed her lips to the bleeding feet of the Divinity.

"Strength—strength!" she whispered. "Have mercy, O my God!"

When he returned to her—his face was the colour of the ivory—she had her arms about the Emblem, holding it to

her breast. She felt strong in its strength. She knew that she would never again be overcome with the irresolution of the moment that had just passed.

"You will not tell me anything—you will not trust me?" he said.

"I cannot. God pity me!—I cannot tell you anything. Oswald—Oswald, my love, it is irrevocable. God will give me strength to withstand the temptation of being your wife—of bringing misery upon you—such misery as you can never dream of."

"Not worse than this—this—the agony of parting. No, by God, we shall not part—you and I." He tried to catch her hands; he failed: her hands were bound to that bound figure of the One who gave the benediction of God to womanhood, the One through whom all generations have called a Woman blessed. "Minna, we cannot part—there is no power that can part us," Oswald continued.

But she never answered him.

"Ah, what a woman is this! What a woman is this!" he cried, as he threw himself into a chair. "She talks of love in one breath, and of parting in the next!"

He did not remain seated more than a few seconds. He sprang up, and once again the two were face to face.

"I will never give you up—never!" he cried. "How can you expect me to give you up, Minna? Do you really fancy that I am a man who would wait for so many years as I have waited for the one woman in the world whom I could love to come before me, and then be content to throw her aside at a word—no, by heaven, not even a word—a hint—a vague hint? If you tell me all there is to be told, you will at least give me a chance of—a chance of life—isn't the question that lies between us a question of life and death, Minna?"

"I cannot tell you. It is all too horrible," she cried.

"Good-bye!" he cried, through his set teeth, before she had quite spoken her last word. "Good-bye!"

He flung out his hand to her. His eyes were gleaming with passion—with anger.

The Crucifix fell at her feet.

At the same instant Gerald entered.

She was able to walk to the door—it was only her last few steps that were unsteady. She was glad when she reached the support of the wall.

One instant she stood there—she knew that he had his eyes fixed upon her. But she never looked round. The sunshine of the summer's day was about her. It was black—blank.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON CANVAS.

HE looked at Gerald. Did Gerald expect him to pose as usual, he wondered.

He was not left long in doubt on this point.

"My dear Clifford, we have lost half an hour," moaned Gerald. "But, after all, it is not lost. Minna said that if I allowed her to have half an hour with you she would promise that your face would not be the same as it has been hitherto. She has kept her promise. There is suffering on every feature—not quite the heroic suffering that we need for the picture, but still—well, it's better than the unheroic commonplace British magistrate's happiness that has almost made me throw up the picture more than once."

"Minna was right," said Oswald. "I shall never know what an expression of happiness is while I live."

"Not for some days, at any rate, I hope," said Gerald, blandly. "At the end of another week you may wear any expression that you please, my dear Clifford."

"Great heavens! you don't fancy that I am going to sit to you to-day?" cried Oswald.

"Why not to-day, the only day that your expression has been worth anything to me?" said Gerald. "Ah, Clifford, let me implore of you. You won't ruin the picture by which I mean to stand or fall in the world. You suggested the picture—don't forget that. If you had not talked to me as you did on the first day that I saw you, would I have begun it? No, no; you will not desert me. I swear to you that it will be the most notable picture ever painted in the world—I swear to you that it will make you famous!"

"Famous!" said Oswald. What was fame to him now? He would have bartered all that the world could offer

for the joy of another five minutes with Minna on their footing of the day before.

"Famous!"

Then it suddenly occurred to him that he might have a chance of hearing Minna's secret from her brother. Surely Gerald must have been made acquainted with its character, even though he might not be aware of its particulars. He would stay and talk to Gerald, and it would, he felt, be strange if, at the end of an hour, he had not got from him information sufficient to give him at least a chance of bringing back Minna. What could have occurred during the night of sufficient potency to make that gulf between them that she had talked about? Only one thing could divide them, and he could not entertain the idea of its existence—nay, he felt that even did that one barrier exist, his love for her was great enough to tear it away, so that it should separate them no longer. But he brushed aside all idea of such a barrier. He knew her. It would be a gross treason toward her to let even a suspicion of her truth—of her goodness, float like a shadow across his mind. He deserved to lose her were he to entertain for a second a suspicion of her.

But he had not lost her.

"Great heaven! can you hesitate for a moment?" cried Gerald, almost piteously. "I tell you that the picture will be the greatest ever painted. You have told me that I can paint. You know that I can paint. I know it also; and I know that I have been waiting to paint this picture for years—years! I have been cherishing the idea in my heart, telling no human being about it. When I saw you it came upon me with the force of an inspiration that my chance had come—that I had at last some chance of realizing my aims. Clifford, you will not have the heart to turn from me now. It would kill me."

He was pacing the studio as he spoke, stopping every now and again before Oswald and making a passionate appeal to him. At the last he was standing with clasped hands and with tears in his eyes in front of the easel on which the half-finished picture was placed.

"I didn't say that I wouldn't give you another sitting," said Oswald. "I should be sorry to disappoint you, but I'm afraid that this may be your last opportunity of painting from me—unless—but for that matter, you really won't

need me to give you another sitting. You only need the expression, and that, you said, would have to be done from another model."

Gerald grasped him by the hand. Such warmth had seemed, a short time before, impossible to be assumed by the man.

"I knew that you would not have the heart to turn away from me at the last moment," he cried. "And—yes—I'll do my best to make this the last sitting. I feel equal to it. The inspiration is here—here." He touched his forehead. His eyes gleamed with the light that Oswald had frequently seen in the depths of those strange eyes of his. "Yes, I feel that my hour has come at last—after long waiting. They say that the supreme moment comes to every artist."

Oswald smiled at the man's enthusiasm—an enthusiasm surpassing that of any man whom he had ever known. He went to the dais, where the curiously-prepared chair stood.

"You don't want the arms, I suppose," he said, as he seated himself.

"No, no; not yet," said Gerald. "I may take ten minutes at them later on, but I only want the head now."

He arranged his canvas and brushes, and then went to the dais to complete the pose of the head. He was unusually patient. He had previously never had any hesitation in showing his impatience. He had stormed and raved at times over what seemed the merest trifles. It seemed pretty clear to Oswald that the threat of cutting short the sittings had brought the painter to his senses (approximately).

"Nothing could be better," cried Gerald, beginning to work. "I have made good progress; and if Minna only retains her expression—ah, how exquisite it was—that passion of agony! that expression of divine suffering!—and yet the suggestion of a woman's fear—the suggestion that there was something before her that she was too womanly to look at without horror—oh, I saw it all on her face just now!"

"What has occurred to change her, Talbot?" cried Oswald.

"Oh, let her change—but you—do not turn your head about the way you are doing," said the painter. "Cannot you ask a simple question without being overcome with excitement?"

"I beg your pardon," said Oswald; "but I should really

like to know what has occurred to change her expression. Yes, you must admit that there is some interest in trying to account for such change."

"La donna è mobile," said the other, with one of his shrugs and the usual accompaniment of a smile.

"But she is not like other women," said Oswald. "You cannot but see that a great change has come over her—something very different from the fickleness of an ordinary woman."

"It is enough for me to perceive that she is far better fitted to appear in this picture than she was yesterday," said Gerald. "I am interested only in effects—causes are nothing to me—as a matter of fact, the thought of them spoils an artist for his work."

Oswald knew the man too well to suggest the possibility of his having some measure of sympathy for his sister in her suffering. He allowed him to continue painting for some time before he spoke again. He felt that he had previously spoken too hastily—too earnestly; the artist required to be treated more artistically, if any information was to be obtained from him.

"You dined at the Tower last evening, I suppose," he remarked with all the casual air of a practised cross-examiner.

"Yes; I dined *en famille*, in the good old English fashion," said Gerald.

"And you had no guests?"

"No guests. If there had been any guests, do you fancy that I would have remained at the table?"

"I thought that perhaps—well, I believe that Sir George occasionally asks a brother-merchant to dine with him."

"Not when I am in residence. Don't move your head."

"Minna didn't tell you about having received any letter containing bad news last night or this morning?"

"Oh, don't worry yourself about these trivialities."

There was some scorn as well as irritation in the man's voice as he made his reply to Oswald's suggested question.

"Trivialities!" cried Oswald. "He calls them—oh, never mind! You see I'm more inclined to worry myself if you don't answer me. You didn't hear anything about a letter, then?"

"I heard nothing, my dear Clifford," said Gerald. "I noticed with a degree of pleasure that you can easily understand the marvellous change upon her face. I called it a

transfiguration. Did I speak too strongly? You saw her face?"

"I saw it—I saw it," moaned Oswald. "A transfiguration, indeed."

"The expression that I need for the picture was on her face. It was the face of the Virgin at the foot of the Cross—Andrea's, you know."

"At the foot of the Cross," said Oswald. "My beloved—my beloved!"

"The beauty of suffering was in every feature of hers—oh, heaven grant that that expression may not leave her! Now, why on earth should you let that gleam come into your eyes?—and your face—oh, it is not the face that I want to be in my picture. The expression is changing every moment: you must have something on your mind."

"Perhaps that is the reason of my failure," said Oswald.

Gerald had flung down his brushes and had thrown himself into a chair in a paroxysm of rage. In a minute, however, he started up with a little exclamation in French.

"What a fool I am!" he cried, and he actually smiled as he stared at his canvas once more, and then glanced at Oswald, who appeared so lost in thought as to be quite unaware of the mood of the painter.

There was a silence in the studio for a considerable space of time.

When Oswald recovered from his fit of abstraction, he found that Gerald was standing at the dais gazing at him.

"What, am I to consider the sitting over for to-day?" said Oswald.

"Scarcely," replied the painter, with another smile. "My dear Clifford, you will pardon me if I say that I find it quite impossible to deal with your face just now. You have something on your mind."

"I admit it," said Oswald.

"I'll ask you to give me another sitting for the arms and hands now," said Gerald. "When I have finished them I hope you will be in a condition to enable me to go on with the face."

"You may make the most of your time: I'm afraid it will be impossible for me to give you another sitting," said Oswald.

"Then I shall have to make the most of my time."

He got upon the dais, and arranged the chair that had

been prepared with the extended back to do duty for the wheel on which Théophile Lacour was supposed to have suffered.

"Now will you remember, Clifford, to bend your fingers when your wrists are bound?" said Gerald, as Oswald seated himself and extended his arms as he had done upon previous occasions. "The hands must seem to be clutching at something—that suggests the suffering quite as much as the contortions of the features."

"Bend them as you please," said Oswald.

"Then for a few minutes I shall have to make your bondage rather constricted," said the painter, as he began to pass the rope about Oswald's arms, binding them to the frame-work.

"I'll not be able to stand that so long as I did yesterday," said Oswald. "You have tightened the rope too much for comfort."

"I must have your arms bent slightly at the elbows, and you will find it easier to maintain the position if I bind you pretty close," said Gerald. "Remember the instinct of the man is to free himself: he is not submissive to the bondage."

He passed the rope, as he had done on the previous day, several times round each of Oswald's arms—at the wrists and then above the elbows. A few yards of the line remained in his hands, which he quickly passed round Oswald's legs, binding them to the lower part of the chair.

"What is that for?" asked Oswald. "You're not going to paint the legs, are you?"

"No; but I want you to have the feeling of being bound," said Gerald. "Yesterday you suggested a man playing at being bound. There was no force whatever in the suggestion of bondage—of suffering. To-day I want something very different. I want you to feel that you are bound."

"And you have certainly your wish," said Oswald. "I consider the binding of the legs nonsense."

Gerald made no reply. He had descended from the dais and was standing in front of it on the floor, surveying with critical eyes the bound man.

"You'll have to give me an inch or two for my right hand; the rope is biting into my flesh most uncomfortably," said Oswald.

The other made no move. He continued his coldly critical survey of his model.

"I wish to heaven you would come down from the clouds and listen to me," cried Oswald. "Unloose my right hand—the binding of the wrist, I mean; the other does not inconvenience me."

The man never moved.

Oswald became impatient. The rope was biting into his flesh.

"Talbot," he said, "I must trouble you to attend to me. Unloose the rope."

Gerald might have been stone deaf. Not until some moments had passed did he make a move—it was a move in the direction of the door.

He took out his key and quietly locked the door, returning the key to his pocket.

Oswald watched him with something more than curiosity. What new idea was it that had taken possession of this mystic painter? he asked himself.

"What do you mean by locking that door?" he asked.

There was a long pause before Gerald said—

"I wonder if you ever heard of Parhassius, Clifford?"

"What has Parhassius got to say to us at the present moment?" cried Oswald. "You heard what I said about the rope. It is getting more uncomfortable every moment."

"He was the greatest painter that ever lived," said Gerald. "He has been my ideal for years—years—ever since I knew what could be accomplished by painting. You have heard of him. He had a slave tortured to death before his eyes, in order that he might witness his tortures and transfer them to his picture. What a picture that must have been!"

"He was a murderer," said Oswald.

"He was an artist," cried Gerald. "When I first read of him I felt that he was the greatest artist that ever lived. I made up my mind that one day I would be as great. That has been my dream—the one aim of my life up to the present. I cherished the design in secret: I awoke every night from a dream of painting from such a model as the old Greek had, and I have lain awake in an agony of disappointment to find that it was but a dream. When you sat opposite to me on the first day we met, I heard a voice that whispered to me, 'That is the man: your hour has come.' . . . I listened to that whisper—it was an inspiration: my hour has come! Clifford, I told you that this picture would be the greatest that the world has ever seen. I told you the

truth: it will be the greatest, and you shall share in its greatness; you shall be the hero of my picture."

He was standing in front of the canvas on the easel, while he was speaking; then he suddenly turned to Oswald with outstretched hands.

Oswald saw how his eyebrows went up into points almost to the top of his forehead. He saw the terrible gleam in his eyes. The truth flashed upon him: that was the gleam of madness.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON FUTURITY.

BEFORE Oswald had made up his mind what he should do—what could he do, bound as he was hand and foot to the heavy chair?—Gerald had gone to the wall and had taken down one of the Italian stiletos in silver sheaths. He drew the weapon from its sheath and flung away the latter. Then he got once again upon the dais, facing Oswald.

"Look here, Talbot," said Oswald; "we've had about enough of this masquerading. If you unloose the rope on my right wrist, I'll sit to you for another hour, and perhaps I may be able to come back to-morrow for a couple of hours."

"I shall not need you to-morrow," said Gerald, quietly. "This is my hour. My God! to think of how often I have looked forward to it during the past ten years! I would tell no one of my aim—I cherished it in silence. Oh, thank God—thank God! it has come at last! I hear it now—that voice which told me the moment I saw you that your fame and mine would go down to all ages linked together—bound together as you are bound to that chair. I shall reproduce the death-agony of a man as no painter has ever done before. Minna had an idea that the old painters of the Crucifixion were in the habit of studying the features of the men who were tortured to death in Italy and Spain two hundred years ago—where the best pictures were painted. She told me her idea in this place. She could not see how I was trembling: I was afraid that she had discovered the nature

of my secret. Poor girl! She was quite satisfied with the expression on that piece of ivory."

The laugh that he gave was the laugh of a madman. Oswald wondered how it was that he had heard him laugh before without knowing that he was a madman.

"I shall not touch your heart; I shall only stab you through the lungs—on the right," said Gerald. "I have studied this point. The most vivid effect that will appear in the picture is the failure of the action of the lungs."

"I daresay," said Oswald. He had often found himself face to face with death, and had only escaped by his coolness. "I daresay the effect will be startling. You would do well to remove my little aneroid barometer: I wear it in my right pocket."

He was bound at each wrist, but his fingers were free. If he could but induce Gerald to come within the grasp of one of his hands!

Gerald laughed again. He knelt by the side of the chair, far removed from Oswald's hands, and took the little aneroid from his pocket.

"I should most certainly have injured it," he said. "It is a delicate instrument."

He laid the stiletto on the dais. In an instant Oswald's foot was upon it.

Then Oswald knew that he had a respite, and he gave a shout—surely some gardeners would be in the neighbourhood and hear him—a long cry for help—help—help!

Gerald sprang to his feet. He made no attempt to release the stiletto. He leapt from the dais and ran to the wall where the companion weapon was still hanging. Drawing it, he rushed at Oswald—Oswald saw the flashing steel above his head and then there came the deadly impact upon his breast—again the weapon was uplifted for another stab—the steel gleamed with the gleaming eyes of the madman—but it did not descend. Gerald saw that Oswald was examining it; the blade was broken an inch from where the point had been: that was why it had not penetrated his side, why it had not even cut the cloth of his waistcoat.

But it had an edge, if it had no point. Oswald saw Gerald test the edge with his finger, and he heard his laugh, as he put forward his hand to tear away Oswald's shirt at the neck. Again Oswald sent out a cry for help. Gerald gave a little start back as the yell sounded in his ear, and the next

instant Oswald's fingers were upon his wrist—the wrist of the hand that held the stiletto.

Then the door of the studio was unlocked and Minna staggered in.

"Don't be frightened, my darling," came the voice of Oswald. "You are perfectly safe—so am I. I don't think that he'll be able to free himself." Then Oswald gave a laugh. He felt that his turn had come to laugh.

She rushed to the dais.

"There is a knife under my foot, Minna," said Oswald. "I'll trouble you to cut through the rope and unwind it."

"Oh, my God—my God!" she cried, "what has happened? What has happened?"

"Don't cut it!" shouted Gerald. "You will help me, Minna; it is for the sake of the picture—it will be the greatest picture ever painted in the world!"

She had already severed the rope in more than one place; it dropped in pieces from Oswald's limbs—his arms, and, at last, his wrists, were free.

But still his fingers remained about the wrist of the other man. Even when he got upon his feet after a little struggle—his fingers were about the other's wrist. A few moments had actually passed before Oswald gave a curious spasmodic start, and stared at the wrist which he was holding, as one stares at the nearest object on awaking from a deep sleep.

With a little exclamation he flung away the thing and seated himself—not in the same chair.

Minna was in another chair with her face down upon her hands.

He watched Gerald slash the canvas on the easel with the broken stiletto. Its edge was keen enough though its point was gone. He watched him walk out of the studio without casting a glance behind him.

Then Oswald sat watching Minna where she sat. He had a curious sensation of happiness—that happiness which people have who begin to realize the extent of a danger they have escaped by a hand's breadth. He looked at his wrist; the skin had been broken in several places by the biting of the hard rope. He pressed his handkerchief upon the bleeding parts—he was surprised to find that, when he bent his head, some drops fell from his forehead. When he had wiped his forehead his handkerchief was saturated.

Then he put his hand to his right side. He felt a slight

pain there; but the skin was not even broken. The blunt end of the steel blade had caused a bruise upon his body—that was all. He felt that he had had another escape from death. But what an escape! The idea of a man like Gerald Talbot placing him in peril of his life seemed ridiculous. Under ordinary circumstances he would not have feared an attack by Gerald Talbot, stiletos and all, even though he himself had no weapon.

Still . . . well, he had escaped. He had every reason to feel satisfied.

Minna was looking at him—yes, if that white creature trembling on the dais was indeed Minna. He stared at her; and then in a moment there came to him the word that Gerald had spoken—Transfiguration.

"You are not wounded—hurt?" she said, after a struggle.

"I? Oh, dear, no; I'm all right," said he. "Yes, you saved me. I could not have held him for more than an hour or so, and he might have shifted the thing to the hand that he had free. I owe my life to you, Minna."

"You owe your peril to me," she cried. "But, thank God! I heard what I fancied was a cry when I was at the other side of the garden and I came . . . You allowed him to bind you."

"He said he must do it. How could I suspect? He has been cherishing that design for years. He had read of the Greek painter who had a slave tortured . . . Oh, we needn't talk of it."

"No—no; we needn't talk of it. Now you know the truth which was too horrible for me to tell you."

"The truth?"

"The truth: he is a madman and I am his sister."

He sprang to his feet with a cry of horror. He covered his face with his hands. . . .

A long time had passed before he came to her, kneeling beside her, and taking her hands in his.

"My poor love!" he said. "My poor love! You suspected this for the first time last night?"

"I never suspected it," said she. "At all times when I asked my guardian to tell me something about my father or mother, he simply told me that they were both dead. His wife—she died when I was ten years old—said the same—my father and mother were dead; they had died in Italy when I was a year old. Last night I told Sir George that

I had promised to marry you, and then—only when I forced him—he showed me a newspaper containing an account of the death of my father. He died by his own hand in a criminal asylum of which he had been an inmate only six months. He had killed his wife—my mother.”

“My poor love! My poor love! God pity you—God pity me!” said Oswald. “But you—you may have escaped the taint.”

“You might have said so yesterday—an hour ago,” said she.

There was a long pause before he said, bowing his head down to her knees—

“My life is ended.”

He spoke with the deepest tenderness from the moment he had come to kneel beside her.

“Ah, no; do not say that, Oswald,” she murmured. “You will not make my burden any heavier, will you?”

“My life is ended. I had dreamt of you all my life. I had felt certain that you would come to me one day; well, you came—you came—was it for this? Oh, my love, was it for this?”

She was silent. What answer could she make to him? What did she know of the guardianship of the people of the world? All that she knew was that a dread voice had said—

“Unto the third and fourth generations.”

Only the second generation had been reached in her. Was she to transmit the curse?

“And *my* life—Oswald, you have loved me?” she said.

“Have loved?—have loved?” he cried. “Ah, my love, there is no past tense in love.”

“You love me, Oswald—you love me, and you will pray that my life may be short—that I shall die before . . .”

She bent her face down to his head—he had not raised it from her knees.

“That is the end of all,” she said. “My life is now but the memory of a few days of happiness. Oh, surely there must remain another life for us. Our God cannot be so cruel—so unjust!”

She spoke in the low tones of a woman who knows that agony has become part of her life. She had already become used to that shadow which had become, not part of her life, but all her life. They did not change their attitudes until a long time had passed. They remained there in silence.

At last he looked up to her face. He put his arm about her neck. Their faces were together.

"My love," he said. "We shall go away together. I will devote my life to you. Fate may be strong—the curse that is laid upon the innocent may be strong—but my love will be stronger still. I will put myself between you and that shadow. After all it is no more than a shadow."

"Oswald, my only answer is that I love you—I love you."

"And therefore you will come with me."

"And therefore we must part. You know me, Oswald; and you know that nothing you could say would shake my determination. But you will say nothing. I know you; you will not say anything that might make me feel myself less worthy of—of parting from you in love."

She knew him. He spoke no word—he did not even say good-bye. The tears upon their faces mingled.

He was gone.

She remained seated in that curious room for a long time alone. Then she wandered around it, looking with curious interest at the tattered canvas on the easel, picking up the pieces of rope that she had cut, and examining them. She replaced the two stilettos in their sheaths and hung them in their places on the wall. She moved the chair on which she had sat an hour before, and there fell at her feet the ivory Crucifix which she had kissed. With a cry of a soul in agony she flung herself upon it, on the floor, laying her head at the Redeemer's feet, and crying—

"The world is dead, but I know that my Redeemer liveth."

CHAPTER XL.

ON NIGHTINGALES.

"WHAT has happened? She will not see me," cried Lily to her father. She had returned from visiting the Tower. Miss Talbot was seeing no one, Miss Talbot's maid told her. "But me—*me*," Lily had cried; "she will see me." The maid shook her head. Miss Talbot had said that if Miss Cosway were to call she was to receive a message of her love, but she could not see Miss Cosway face to face for some

days yet. No, the maid could not say what was the matter. Mr. Talbot and Sir George had gone away together early the day before; but that was all that the maid knew, and to know only so much meant to know nothing whatever. No, Mr. Clifford had not been to the Tower for three days.

"You will give her my love," Lily had said, and had then hurried home to ask her father that question—

"What has happened?"

"I wonder if it is possible for you to guess what has happened," said the historian. "Under what circumstances does a young woman find it impossible to see her best-beloved among other young women?"

"How can I possibly tell?" cried Lily. "If I didn't feel so strongly about poor Minna I should say that the only time a girl will not see her best friend is when she has the mumps—mumps are so easily passed round; and they are so horrid!"

"The barrier of the mumps can be surmounted," said Mr. Cosway. "The increase of the surface of the kissing area—I shrink from saying the area of the legitimate kiss—does not point to indefinite seclusion. The exigencies of the visit of congratulation upon the acquirement of a lover who makes a promise—the most satisfactory of all lovers—compel a young woman to be always at home and visible. Does she like to be visible, Lily?"

"Of course she likes to be visible," cried Lily. "If a girl isn't visible when she has got her lover, when may one expect her to appear? She likes to meet her friends at home—"

"And her enemies in the gate," said her father. "Well, you have gone through a course of logic; you know the value of reasoning by deduction. If a young woman is gladdest to meet her friends—and her enemies—when she has found her lover, when is she most disposed to avoid the same persons?"

"Why, when she has lost—heavens! do you mean to suggest that Minna and Oswald—that she—*she*—and he—oh, my dear papa, it is not safe to apply the cold steelyard of logic to all cases indiscriminately. Minna and Oswald should be regarded individually, and not lumped with ordinary every-day lovers, who, I suppose, are quite obedient to the inflexible laws of logic and deduction—the strait-waistcoats of the imagination."

"And you and Willie?"

"Well, we also object to be lumped with the general mass. But that's not to the point. Do you really think that Minna refuses to see me because something has come between her and Oswald?"

"I am clay in the hands of the potter. I receive my impressions from you, my dear. I am even beginning to know something about Woman from you."

"I am beginning to know something about her myself; we are learning side by side, O my father. But Minna—oh, heavens! if something has come between Minna and Oswald, who among us is safe?"

"The question is a serious one, especially for such lovers as are gazing down a vacant vista of time."

"Two years and three months."

"Less a fortnight."

"There is really no security for love except in marriage."

"The wisdom of civilization has spoken."

"And yet a friend of Willie's—his name was Skilleter—was accustomed to say to such of his intimates as came to him confessing that they had fallen in love, 'You'd best fall out of it.' 'How?' 'Marry.'"

"Civilization and Skilleter are not necessarily antagonistic. The nightingale will not sing its best in a cave, and without its song the nightingale is a poor thing. Skilleter assumes that marriage is the nightingale in a cage. But does civilization aim at the nightingale? No, my child; civilization aims at the barn-door fowl, and the barn-door fowl thrives wonderfully in the barn. The vocal deliverances of the male of the tribe do not so closely resemble the song of the nightingale as to be mistaken for it by a restless sleeper while the dawn is still grey; but the voice of the female, heard with a shrill diminuendo in the final note, gives a pleasing assurance of a well-appointed breakfast-table."

"You are a little puzzling, O father. Lay before me a parable that is susceptible of only one interpretation."

"A parable? Ah, let me see. The Parable of the Lover Who Got Married. There was once a youth who walked through the world at a season when all the world was vocal. He had heard the song of the nightingale, and he was in search of that bird; but though he often heard her sing—the parable assumes that the female bird sings; so did the poets—he never could get within reach of her. Roaming

grief-stricken through the wood, he came upon the wattled abode of a Wise Woman, who said to him, 'What seekest thou, O Youth, with the melancholy mug and the kithara of one string upon which thou harpist somewhat ridiculously? There be men within this wood who have taken vows to slay all musicians who harp on one string. Bowmen all be they, and every man of them hath more than one string to his weapon. Therefore beware!' And the youth replied, 'I seek, O Wise Woman, the only bird worth a dahm of two denarii—a current coin of the woodland—and that bird is the nightingale; and, moreover, I shall rest neither day nor night until I find my nightingale.' He passed on, harping on his one string, and he became intolerable to all men in the woodland, so that they said to the Wise Woman, 'In the name of Zeus give him a medicine that will mend him or end him.' And she gave him the prescription of a subtle charm which she told him would enable him to catch the nightingale. He took it and got it made up at the nearest chemist's, and partook of it; and lo, that very eve, when he was faring forth in search of the nightingale, he heard the prolonged diminuendo of a very ordinary barn-door hen; and the charm began to work, making him fancy that that cackle was the loveliest song of a nightingale that had ever reached his ears. He listened enraptured, with tears in his eyes; and then he managed—with some difficulty, for she pretended that she didn't want to go, and suggested that other youths were making honourable proposals to her—to induce the hen to go with him to his cottage, where she occupied a roost in the kitchen—she took kindly to the kitchen—for many days. But one morning the charm ceased to work: he awoke from his dream, and he heard the old hen cackling in the kitchen. 'Ah,' he cried, 'thou art no nightingale, but only a common or garden hen.' 'I am no nightingale, in faith,' said she, 'but thou hast a fresh egg for thy breakfast.' 'Ay,' said he, 'but the nightingale——' 'Canst thou breakfast off a lyric?' she cried—somewhat shrilly, I believe. 'Canst thou serve it poached on toast, or *à la Princesse*, to say nothing of *en Darioles au Beurre de Tomates*? Go to, thou art no longer a youth. The song of the nightingale is but air driven through a diaphragm of peculiar make; but an egg is an egg. Come in to breakfast, and thank God for having given thee a good old hen. Come in to breakfast, I say!' And he went in and said a blessing, and then a grace; and he lived to the age of

one hundred and three years, and at last died of a surfeit of omelettes. There's a parable that cannot be misinterpreted even by the most subtle theologian."

He kissed her on the forehead and hurried off to his study. He had already been delayed half an hour beyond his accustomed time for resuming his work after lunch.

But Lily, while puzzling over his parable, catching a gleam of light here and there through the maze of words, as (possibly) the youth in the parable had caught a gleam among the branches under which he wandered while pursuing his quest, had still an uneasy feeling that the whole did not bear directly upon the question of the origin of Minna's seclusion, however it might touch, with a vast show of wisdom, upon the question of the disillusioning influence of marriage—a matter to which she was altogether indifferent.

Was it possible that her father was right? she asked herself. Was it possible that Minna had lost her lover?

The thought of the bare possibility of such an incident made her feel passionately indignant with Oswald. (She assumed that the division—if division there was—between them should be laid to the charge of Oswald.) Ah, he had never really valued her as she had valued her. He had been quite unaware of the treasure that he had secured. Lily began to try and recall any time that she had had a suspicion of the steadfastness and the truth of Oswald. Surely she must at some time have perceived a weakness in his character.

She utterly failed in her attempts to recall any incident that had tended to weaken her earliest impression of him. Still, he must have been very bad to have forsaken Minna.

And dwelling upon this point caused her to feel once more, but with greater force, the truth of what she had remarked to her father:

"If something has come between Minna and Oswald, who among us is safe?"

Her thought gradually assumed another form:

"If something has come between Minna and Oswald within the first fortnight of their meeting as lovers, what chance is there for Willie and me during the next two years and three months—less a fortnight?"

She had been so accustomed to view matters logically she could not get rid of the habit all at once, though, to be sure,

falling in love is a great help to those who desire to accept the standpoint of the illogical.

But in the course of an hour or two she had begun to think that perhaps she had been too hasty in assuming that the wisdom of her father could not be at fault. He was too apt, she had often thought, though at that moment she could not remember any instance to justify her contention, to suggest an opinion with an earnestness that was proportionate to its adaptability to a striking phrase. But for that matter it was his capacity for expressing opinions in an attractive form that made him beloved of publishers, and that brought people from Boston and Chicago to hang round the gate of his cottage.

Perhaps something outside her father's sphere of knowledge—if there was anything outside it in heaven above or earth beneath—had placed a barrier between Minna and Oswald.

But what could it be?

When Willie Passmore and Miss Larkspur came through the gate carved by the bowie-knives, they found her in tears among the roses of her garden.

Willie looked around for someone whom he could hold accountable for those tears and was greatly disappointed when she declined to attribute them to the machinations of anyone: she did not even blame her father for them.

She told them her story. She had been to see Minna and Minna had sent her her love.

"But nothing else?" said Willie.

"Only a message that it was impossible for her to see me."

"Great apothecary!" cried Willie. "You had no falling out?"

Lily flashed an indignant look at him that acted upon him as a burning-glass acts upon a leaf.

"A falling out!"

"I didn't suggest it; but girls sometimes do, you know," said he. The ashes which he had heaped upon his head were in every word.

"Girls!"

"But what's the matter?" cried Miss Larkspur. "What has come to her, anyway? Has anyone been foolin' round with stories? Has he been confessing all? I understand that most lovers think it right to give away all their past life to the young woman just before the happy day, or after it—in the latter case the happy day is not a happy day."

"I know nothing," said Lily. "Only Oswald has not been to the Tower for some days, though Sir George and Gerald Talbot have gone away and she is alone."

"What a chance for Oswald!" remarked Willie, with one of his old chuckles—only his chuckle had now a different sound in Lily's ears: it was no more like the old chuckle than the "Dio dell' or" of M. Faure—the greater Faure, who is the baritone, not the lesser, who is only President of the Republic—is like a bushman's "coo-ee." "What a chance for Oswald!"

(It will be remarked that Miss Cosway gave her friends a piece of information on the case under notice, beyond what she had volunteered to her father.)

"Perhaps friend Clifford has too strict a sense of honour to visit the Tower in the absence of Sir George and the brother," suggested Miss Larkspur.

"Sense of honour! he isn't quite the ass you seem to fancy," said Willie, his mouth becoming a crescent.

"Willie," said Lily.

"No, he's not an ass. Sense of honour! I'll stand up for my friend," cried he.

"Oh, it's all a mystery," cried Lily. "But it has come upon me with all the force of a revelation. If two people, who are so plainly made for each other as they are, can part within a fortnight, what chance have ordinary people?"

"People that Providence hadn't exactly in His eye when He set to whittling down people for one another?" said Miss Larkspur.

"Yes; that's just what I'd like to know," said the girl.

"It needs a man with sand in his constitution to grapple with a question like that," said Miss Larkspur.

"It's not me that would try to grapple with it," remarked Willie.

"No; you're not brainy enough for it," said Miss Larkspur. "But about the young woman—we mustn't give her up, must we?"

"Give her up?" cried Lily. "How could we give her up?"

"Her trouble, I mean," said Miss Larkspur.

"Our trouble," said Lily. "We'll call it our trouble."

"So it is—so it is. I've taken to her, Lily Cosway; yes, I've taken to her since the first day we met in your parlour."

"I remember. She put you in mind of someone. And Minna took to you, Miss Larkspur—she told me so."

Miss Larkspur sat with her hands in her lap. Her eyes were gazing at a new-burst rose in the bed at her feet. She did not move her eyes for a long time.

"She has no mother—she has never known what it is to sit with a mother in the parlour when the fire is brisk and the air is getting dusk—to sit talking about—well, about anything: a new dress, maybe, it's a healthy enough topic. It's not the talk: it's the sense of sitting together, the girl and her mother . . . And she might have . . . But now she must carry her trouble alone."

"I wish I could share it with her," said Lily.

"How is it that I didn't chance to hear a word about that brother of hers?" asked Miss Larkspur, suddenly. "I never heard tell that she had a brother. Has he been here often?"

"She has really seen very little of him since she was a child, she told me," said Lily. "I think she might as well be without a brother for all the value he is as a companion. He was always full of his affectations, but I never saw him so absurd as he is now."

"It's not grief at parting from him that's the matter with her?" suggested Miss Larkspur.

"Whatever may be the matter with her, it is not that," said Lily, with a laugh.

"It's not a money matter, should you say? Sir George Anderson seems in a good way."

"Oh, no, no; you may be sure that money has nothing to say to it. As for Sir George—oh, he's extremely rich; but—well, I don't think that papa likes him—he certainly hates papa."

"Bless my heart! Why? Why do they hate each other?"

"I have no idea. Oh, don't men hate one another every day without any cause? One man objects to the sort of collar another wears and calls him a cad. The other objects to the fur coat a first wears, and denounces him as a snob."

"Skilleter of Magdalen says that a cad is the man we don't want to know and a snob is the man who doesn't want to know us," said Willie, loosely. He was beginning to be sorry that he had brought his (nominal) aunt with him. Why, if she were not with him he might . . . but she was with him.

Lily sprang to her feet and caught him by the right hand.

"Willie," she said, "you are a man. This is a man's work that I lay upon you—a sacred mission: you will have to find

out during the next two days if Oswald Clifford is the cause of Minna's grief, and if he is, you must give him such a beating as he never got in all his life."

Willie stood, not quite aghast, but certainly surprised.

"I don't think Clifford is the sort of man that has got used to being beat," said he. "He's a Johnnie that'll take a deal of beating."

"Then you must give him a deal of it," said Lily. "You understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand. But I'll not have to take off my coat to him, for I can swear that he has nothing to say to the business," said Willie.

"Papa says he has, and papa is never wrong," said Lily.

"He's wrong there," said Willie, doggedly.

"What!" cried Lily. "You take Oswald Clifford's part against me?"

"I do," said he. "I take his part against all comers—you, your dad, Aunt Immy—the world! I don't know much about girls, but I know a man when I meet one. I won't insult Clifford by thinking for a moment that he is the cause of—of—whatever it is has come over Minna. Now, move up a bit, Aunt Immy, and give me a share of the seat. What's big enough for two is big enough for three. Did you ever hear of the Irish car-driver who said that his car would hold six if they sat adjacent, and eight if they sat familiar?"

"I hate Irish stories," said Lily, "but—I like you. I, too, am beginning to know a man when I see one."

She spoke very humbly.

CHAPTER XLI.

ON COMPROMISE.

THAT evening Lily wrote a long note to her beloved Minna asking her why she could not tell her what had happened that forced her to remain shut out from those who loved her, and were dying to kiss her and sympathize with whatever sorrow she had to bear. She sent this letter and got a loving reply from Minna the next day, thanking her for her offer of sympathy, and expressing the hope that she should be able to see all her dear friends in the course of a short time, though she could not bear to see them immediately.

Lily was reading the letter—not without tears—when Willie appeared on the garden path with Oswald by his side—Oswald, but how changed!

He looked ten years older than when she had last seen him with Minna in the drawing-room at the Tower. It was the thought of that bright day and the little mock scene of comedy which had passed between them that made poor Lily burst into tears as she took the hand that he offered her now. She dropped his hand and, sitting on her garden-chair, covered her face with her own hands trying to suppress her sobs.

(And it was from this very seat that she had on the previous day given Willie a command to beat him—a mission which she meant to have all the sacred aspects of a Holy War.)

He might have been her lover, so tenderly did he try to soothe her—as a matter of fact, her lover, who stood by with his hands in his pockets, staring out over the landscape as though he were an excursionist determined to have the full value of his third-class return ticket, felt in a moment that he could not have made anything like so good an attempt to soothe her as Oswald was making.

“My poor child—my poor child!” Oswald was saying as he put his arm around her bent shoulders. “My

sweet Lilyflower, don't let my last hours here with you be sad."

Her sobs ceased, and in an instant she was sitting up, looking at him through tearful eyes.

How well he knew how to do the soothing business! Willie thought. How well he knew how to introduce a word or two that absorbed her attention! And now he was holding her hand as tenderly as possible in both his own—Willie owned to himself that he had never behaved with anything like the same tenderness to her. He felt that he was getting a lesson in the art.

"Your last hours here?" faltered Lily.

"So he said," remarked Willie. He thought that his presence had been long enough ignored. After all, he was Lily's lover. "So he said to me when I called on him. I told him I thought he was a damfool. I hope you'll tell him so too, Lily."

Lily scarcely felt herself justified in going quite so far.

"Why must you go?" she said. "What can have happened to make you go? You don't fancy that anything can have happened to turn her away from loving you? Oh, no; I know her."

"Alas! Alas! it is not the love that is at an end," said he.

"Ah, then, if you still love each other there can't be much wrong," said she, her face brightening as a liquid April day brightens, and all the rain-tipt spring flowers wear the glittering coronets of princesses.

He shook his head sadly.

"It would be better for us if there was no love between us," said he.

"Don't say that," she cried. "Is there anything better than love? You know there is nothing better. Then why wish that it were at an end?"

He was looking into her face with a smile that was all sadness on his own.

"If you knew all," said he, turning away his head.

"I know nothing," said she—"nothing except that if your love is still alive there cannot be much wrong."

"If you knew all!" he said once more. "If you knew all that we know—my beloved and I—you would see, as we do, that it would be better for us if all our love were dead—buried in a sepulchre on which no 'Resurgam' is cut. There

is no hope for us. There can come no bright hour in our future—I am wrong; the future has one bright hour in store for each of us—the hour of death.”

“And you cannot tell anyone what terrible thing has happened to change both your lives?” said she.

“God help us! We cannot even breathe it: it is too horrible to be expressed in words. But we know what it is, and we know that for us there is no hope. That is all that either of us can say to you or to anyone else who may be like you, full of sympathy for us. I thought when I returned from my life of wandering, and when I caught a glimpse of our darling, that I could look forward to a rest—such a rest, with her beside me for evermore. . . . It was not to be. I shall start once again on my old life.”

“But not at once,” she cried, piteously. “Not at once. Why should you be as if you were anxious not to lose a moment in going away?”

“I cannot go too soon, my child,” he said. “If there was any chance—any hope—”

“How can you know that there is none?” she cried. He shook his head, with that sad smile on his face. “You cannot tell. You could not tell the day before the blow fell that it was about to fall. Shouldn’t that make you feel that you have no right to be secure in your assumption that there may not be a great good awaiting you? If the evil was unforeseen, why may not the good be equally unforeseen? Oh, don’t shake your head so despondently. We know nothing of what’s in store for us—either for bad or good. Had you the least notion, before you met Minna, that there was anyone so sweet and beautiful and perfect?” He shook his head. “Of course you hadn’t. Why, before I saw Willie—but that doesn’t matter. What I want you to do for me is to promise to stay here for a month still.”

“Yes, within easy reach of Providence,” said Willie. “Give Providence a chance, old chap.”

“Stay here and look at your trouble straight in the face,” resumed Lily.

“Yes; that’s how to put it,” cried Willie. “Straight in the face. The power of the human eye upon trouble is the same as it is upon any other beast. A month may bring about a great change. At any rate, you’re as comfortable here as you’re likely to be elsewhere.”

“If you only knew what our trouble is, you would tell me

to go—to go to the uttermost ends of the earth,” said Oswald. “But I’ll take your advice: I’ll stay here for a month. Nothing that I may do can make much difference to me. Only, to be near her and yet feel that between us that great gulf is fixed—the gulf that lies between heaven and hell!—oh, I can’t stay here for a month.”

“Well, say a fortnight; that shows that we’re not bitter against you—that we’re ready to accept a reasonable compromise. What do you say, my dear?” cried Willie.

“I can say nothing more. What am I that I should undertake to advise a man?” said Lily.

“You are the sweetest girl in the world,” said Oswald. “All that you have said to me just now is good and reasonable and just, and I’ll stay a month at the Court, however great a struggle it may be for me.”

“That’s right,” said Lily. “Oh, surely the management of the affairs of the world cannot be so utterly astray as to make it impossible for two people who love each other so truly as you and Minna love to remain near each other!”

“That’s just what I feel,” cried Willie. “I used to think long ago, you know, that everything in the world was rotten—that the world might have its uses, but that it was certainly no place for respectable people. But I’ve got more hopeful lately. Since I met Lily I’ve been thinking that there’s a lot of good in the world. Stay for a month. Things may all change right about inside a month. You may not be of the same mind in a month as you are to-day. There’s none of us to be depended on for a whole month.”

Lily looked up at him quickly. He was just going a little too far in his recommendation of a month of waiting.

“I’ll stay a month,” said Oswald, once more. “But the month can bring no change to us—Minna and myself. Only if the month could obliterate the history of the past twenty-five years could it help us. But I know it cannot alter anything—our trouble—your goodness—your sympathy. These will not change. Good-bye, my dear child; God bless you! You will have happiness. You deserve every happiness.”

He pressed her hand, giving his other hand to Willie, and then went away, leaving poor Lily as tearful as she had been when he came to her.

Willie could say nothing that tended to comfort her.

Oswald had not gone very far along the road on his way back to the Court before he overtook Miss Larkspur. He

thought he might pass her with a recognition, but she did not allow him to do so.

"Mr. Clifford," she said, "you're not such a fool as to fancy that because I'm a middle-aged spinster wearing a blue veil on a chip hat it would be ridiculous for me to talk about my heart to a young man."

"You're quite right there, Miss Larkspur," said he. "I would be the last to seek to deprive you of that privilege."

"On second thoughts, I won't talk to you about my heart, sir," said the middle-aged spinster. "I'll talk about yours—that is what I desiderate."

"Oh, about my heart, Miss Larkspur?" said he.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Clifford, I take a bigger interest than maybe you think I have a right to in Miss Minna Talbot."

"You are very good," said he.

"If it hadn't been for the chance of seeing her, I don't think that I should find myself on this side just now."

"I wasn't aware of that."

"That's so, anyway. I heard something about her on our side, and I was interested in her. It wasn't quite to look after the interests of our Willie that I crossed, I can tell you."

"Willie is all right, isn't he, Miss Larkspur?"

"He's all right, sir. I wonder if you're all right, Mr. Clifford?"

"I'm all wrong, my dear Miss Larkspur. I'm in great trouble."

"Our Lily told me something of it, Mr. Clifford. All that she told me set me thinking what sort of a man you were. Have you quarrelled with Minna?"

"Quarrelled with her? No, no; it would be impossible for us to quarrel. She is the best woman that the world holds."

"Then you're going to marry her after all, and we've all been taken in?"

"Alas, no; all thought of marrying her has gone from me. All the hopes of my life were set upon it a few days ago; but now no vestige of hope remains."

"She agrees with you?"

"She agrees with me. There is a barrier between us. A great gulf—she said it—those were her words."

"But it is for a man to remove a barrier, and—well, it can't be true, all that they say about modern engineering

science having made great strides, if it's impossible to fill up a great gulf. Would you not accept the contract, Mr. Clifford?"

"No power can remove the barrier—no power can fill up the great gulf. God himself cannot change the past."

"The past? The barrier has come out of the past?"

"Yes; but unhappily, as things are ordered in the world, we who live in the present are still a part of those who lived in the past."

"Isn't that a hard saying, Mr. Clifford?"

"I don't think so. My dear Miss Larkspur, the nature of the obstacle that exists, and that must for ever remain between Minna and myself, cannot be so much as hinted at by either of us. It is terrible, but it is there, and no power can remove it."

They walked on together for some time in silence. At last Miss Larkspur said in a low tone—

"Has the obstacle got to say to the girl's parentage?"

He stopped and gazed at her for some moments.

"You know it, then?" he said.

"Yes, I know something of it," said she. "But is it right and just, Mr. Clifford, that the children should suffer for their parents?"

"The righteousness and the justice of the suffering are not for us to decide upon," said he. "The righteousness and justice are the decrees of nature. The laws of nature are inflexible, and the most inflexible is the law of heredity. It is terrible—terrible as many things in nature are."

"Then you are afraid to marry her lest nature may repeat herself?" said Miss Larkspur. "You will separate yourself and her from all chance of happiness on account of your belief in an evil being hereditary?"

"We have determined that it must be so," said he.

"Then, all I can say is that I've a very poor opinion of you, Mr. Clifford," said Miss Larkspur. "And, moreover, I don't hesitate to say that you can never have cared a peanut for Minna Talbot, or you'd be content to go through fire and water for her—the fire of the Bottomless Pit—the water of the great gulf that you say is fixed between you. Yes, you're a poor sort, Mr. Clifford. Good-day to you, Sir."

She turned about and walked back upon the road that they had traversed together.

CHAPTER XLII.

ON RIDDLES.

MISS LARKSPUR did not think it necessary to acquaint Willie Passmore or Lily Cosway of the nature of the little chat which she had had upon a portion of the well-trodden road between the wooden gate of the cottage of the historian and the iron gate of the towered mansion of the ex-Mayor of Weighborough. Lily had come to dine at the Mooring, for her father had taken his departure that morning for the Cathedral town of Merechester, to be the fellow-guest of the great German historian Herr Greimhaus, at the Deanery. The Dean of Merechester did a little pottering on his own account around the doorways leading to the study of certain periods: playing at knuckle-bones in the porches of history—that was how Mr. Cosway put the clergyman's well-meant labours—and he liked bringing distinguished historians under the roof of the Deanery: it made him feel that he was one of their little band—that he too was an historian. As Mr. Cosway was not to return until late at night, Lily had accepted Miss Larkspur's invitation to dine with her and Willie. Colonel Passmore had long ago ceased to be on dining terms with Miss Larkspur, and therefore the attraction of this select dinner-party was all the greater to the one guest.

She learned incidentally that the Colonel's servant, who was a native of some part of Hindustan—Miss Larkspur could not be brought to see that the man was not necessarily a "nigger"—had taken up a certain position in the kitchen, whence he turned out some very remarkable *plats* of which his master partook with real—though his nephew affirmed it was only well-stimulated—relish an hour before the usual dinner time at the Mooring.

She could well believe Miss Larkspur's statement that this arrangement was, on the whole, a great convenience to the household: it permitted of the Colonel's dining alone, and as he usually conferred distinction upon the language

of the Bengal Presidency by making it the medium of his vituperative comments upon various systems of cooking, it was considered by the household to be highly advisable that he should have someone handy who was capable of appreciating the import of his remarks.

Besides, the Colonel found it impossible to impart to the other members of the household his taste for red pepper, capsicums, mangoes, or Bombay duck; and as he regarded as quite insipid every comestible that did not contain all those ingredients, it was difficult to cater for his fastidious palate and at the same time for the tastes of the other members of the household who were satisfied with a cuisine somewhat less pyrotechnic in design.

Lily had now only her moments of melancholy on account of her beloved Minna. What could she say further than she had already said? Was there anything left for her to do? She felt that in inducing Oswald to give his promise to remain at the Court for a whole month she had done more than any human being in the world could accomplish. She knew, however, that he was remaining only because he was fond of her, not because he had any hope that the month would bring about any change in regard to the relations existing between himself and Minna. She had seen no faint gleam of hope in his face when she had suggested the possibility of that mysterious barrier being removed; nor even when Willie insisted on the likelihood of a month changing all their minds did he make any sign. He was without hope.

It was the strangest thing she had ever known, Lily declared more than once in the presence of her father, and her father had agreed with her in English delivered in a style to which no exception could be taken.

"But why the month?" he had asked her when she had told him of the interview with Oswald. "Why name exactly a month?"

"Perhaps I had an idea that Minna could not keep the secret from me for longer," said Lily.

"Oh."

"You see we can do nothing—we can make no suggestion one way or another, while we remain in ignorance of the very nature of that mysterious barrier he talks of—she talks of. But I'm quite certain that we'll know all about it—or, at any rate, we'll know sufficient to serve for advising pur-

poses before the month is over—perhaps before a week is over; but it's best to leave a margin for the unforeseen. What do you think we should do in the mean time, papa—that is, if you think that we should do anything?"

"When in doubt keep your eye on the rogue," remarked the historian.

"Oh, the rogue. Is there a rogue about?"

"When the rogue is not apparent, it may serve your purpose to keep your eye on the nearest business man," replied her father. "If he has the reputation of being a good business man, keep both your eyes on him."

And then he had gone into his study, leaving her, as he usually did leave her, a pathetic Pleiad lost in a somewhat nebulous brilliancy.

All the way up to that select dinner-party Lily had kept repeating her father's advice—she always carefully considered his advice and sometimes even took it; though as he assured her his suggestions were not meant as advice, he never did more than smile when she confessed to him upon the occasions of rejection of the promptings of his wisdom.

"*Keep your eye on the rogue?*"

What could he mean by that?

Who was the rogue? Where was the rogue?

These were the questions which she asked herself on the way to the Mooring, and these were the questions which she put to Miss Larkspur and Willie when they were alone eating their strawberries and cream after a dinner in which the clam (imported) and the cranberry had taken a comparatively humble part.

"The rogue," said Willie. "Who's the rogue? Well, it's good advice. But he doesn't suggest that Oswald is the rogue, does he?"

"Oh, papa never forgets himself so far as to particularize," said Lily.

"Who is the rogue?" said Willie, in a tone of a deep thinker.

"Where is the rogue?" said Lily.

"Where is old man Anderson?" said Miss Larkspur.

They both stared at her.

"What on earth—oh, I told you that papa never liked Sir George Anderson," said Lily.

"What has that got to do with it, Missy?" said Miss Larkspur. "I only put an enquiry to you in case I may

have any money to invest at a moment's notice. Ain't he a good business man?"

Lily's spoon fell with a little crash upon her plate.

"And I never told you what papa said to me afterwards," she cried.

"Oh! did he give you another hint?" asked Miss Larkspur.

"He said, 'When the rogue is not apparent, it will serve your purpose to keep your eye on the nearest business man: if he has the reputation of being a good business man, keep both your eyes on him!'"

"Professor Cosway has gone through the world with both eyes wide," said Miss Larkspur. Her own were not wide at that moment; on the contrary, they were half closed. "And, as a matter of fact, where is old man Anderson, just now?"

"I can't tell you," replied Lily. "I only heard from the maid that he had gone away with Gerald Talbot. He may have returned. Do you really fancy that papa was thinking of Sir George when he said—but I forgot: he always did dislike Sir George, so that anything he might say wouldn't count."

"Professors of history may, after all, be human now and again, and indulge in a little human weakness in private life, I suppose," said Miss Larkspur, and immediately afterwards became contemplative.

It was not until Lily was at the point of departing for her home—Willie was good enough to volunteer to act as her guide through the intricate byways—that Miss Larkspur said—

"I wonder where Old Man Anderson comes in."

"Comes in? In what?" asked Lily.

"In the deal."

"The deal?"

"Yes. How much is it that the folks say he's worth in round numbers? Figure it up in dollars, Missy."

"Some one said a hundred thousand pounds."

"Good-night, my dear. I rec I'll do the figuring the first time I'm in the open air."

"Now what can she mean?" said Lily to her companion, when they had gone some way down the carriage drive.

"Oh, I'm getting a bit tired of all these riddles," said he. "You'll not help Minna out of her difficulty by giving her a present of a book of keys to all the riddles that were ever

compounded. Are you still satisfied with me? That's more to the point."

"Yes," she said, "I'm satisfied with you. I wonder if there's anything better than this sort of life. Awaking every morning to feel that there's some one who, you are quite certain, is loving you all he can; going to bed feeling sure that some one—the same person, mind—will be unable to sleep through thinking of you. Is there anything better than the thought that you are keeping some one awake all night?"

"Why, of course there is something better," said he. "It's better to feel sure that the other person is asleep and dreaming of you. And this is better . . . and this . . . and this. Great Lord Henrietta! To think that we've been together for three hours and a half without our lips once touching! Doesn't it seem a shameful waste of time? And isn't there a hymn that says something about having to pay dearly in the long run for every wasted hour?"

"I'm not so sure that the writer was thinking of kisses when he wrote that," said Lily. "A man shouldn't be thinking of kisses when he sits down to write a hymn."

"I suppose he might get switched on to another track," said he, "and then people would shake their heads—young people, you know—not so old as we are."

"Ah," said she, "I wonder if you think you've found the nightingale?"

"The nightingale? I haven't been looking for one. What would I do with one if I had it?"

She laughed and proceeded to tell him the parable which she had heard from her father a few days before—the Parable of the Lover Who Got Married.

She had her doubts about his appreciating its full literary or ethical value. He didn't seem to think much of it; but it lasted her until they reached the Cottage, and proceeded to await on the garden seat the arrival of Mr. Cosway from the railway station. Willie said that it would be impossible for him to get any sleep that night unless he had the consciousness of returning her to her father's arms.

It was an exquisite summer night—a night in which the whole world seems to have melted into the luscious scent of a rose—in which all the thoughts—the dreams—the aspirations of a man and a woman find their realization in the scent of a rose.

It was within an hour of midnight, but darkness had not yet come to the sky. When the roses of mid-June have burst into bloom the season of that land has been reached by lovers—that land where there is no night. The summer silence of the world was in itself a harmony—the hushed music of the great love that beats in the heart of the rose—in the one heart of the man and the woman.

There was silence on the garden seat as they sat with their arms about each other and their cheeks together. They were living in that atmosphere of rose-scents and silent harmonies. They had heard the voice of the angel of the lovers who flies between the heaven and the earth on a mid-June night, whispering "Hush," and they were hushed.

How long was it before that little laugh of hers broke the silence?

"Why is he not here?" she said, trying to fasten in its place a long strand of her hair that had somehow broken free from all control. It shone through the exquisite dusk.

"Oh, why should he be here?" said Willie, a trifle less fluently—certainly less distinctly—than she had spoken.

"Great heaven!" she cried, springing to her feet. "An accident!—the train!—and here are we thinking that we were in another world!"

"My dearest," said he, "why should such a thought come to you?"

"Isn't it always the way in this world?" she cried. "Isn't it just at the moment when one is too happy that the blow falls?"

She hurried to the door: she had a key, for she had told the servants not to wait up for her or her father. She let herself into the hall and hurried round to the drawing-room where a lamp was burning. He followed her.

Propped up against the lamp-stand was the yellow cover of a telegram. She tore it open, her heart beating. It was a telegram from her father.

"Cannot return for three days. Ask Minna stay with you," were the words of the despatch.

She laughed, one hand pressed to her heart—she laughed and gave the telegram to him, while she threw off her wrap and seated herself on the sofa. Then he laughed too.

"We can still be in that other world you talked of," said he.

"The roses," she whispered.

He knew what she meant. He went to the French window and opened it on its hinges. In a second the room was flooded with the intoxicating perfume.

She sat among the cushions of the sofa, and her breathing in of the soul of the rose into her own soul sounded like sighs. Her lips were apart; the soft light of the lamp shone upon the rising and falling of her white bosom. Her beautiful eyes had a lustre that he had never seen in them before—he saw it now with beating heart as he stood with one hand on the frame of the French window that he had opened.

He stood watching her . . . how long? . . . how long? . . . his eyes ached with the glory of it . . . his lips were athirst.

And then with a cry he turned from her and rushed out by the window—across the rose-beds, trampling them down—she saw his footprints the next day—over the gate and along the road like one mad.

Mad?

No, he was not mad.

* * * * *

Two days passed before he appeared again at the Cottage. She met him, but she did not laugh.

“Put on your hat and come for a walk with me,” he said. She went.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON ROSES.

OSWALD CLIFFORD was not without a subject to occupy his thoughts after Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur had parted from him on the roadside; and now as he roamed alone through the great house that had been his father's and his forefathers' for some hundreds of years, he passed some of the worst days of his life.

Minna had only been once at the Court; but since he had first seen her, he could enter no room without seeing her there before him. Her lovely figure lent a charm to every part of the old mansion. He had seemed to see her daily—nightly—walking through the great drawing-rooms. The faint pink silk tapestry panels of the Louis Seize room made an appropriate background for her shapely head. How exquisite she would look in the dress of one of the masquerading shepherdesses of the screen which had been painted by Antoine Watteau! He could see her bending over the roses for which the great Sèvres bowls had been made. He could see her in white satin among the old black oak of the panelled dining-hall—seated in the great chair that stood below the portrait by Van Myn of a lady member of the family, in shimmering white satin. But it was the boudoir near his own bedroom that seemed to him ever fragrant with her gracious presence. He had brought her into this room the day she had taken tea with him, and while Lily and her lover were playing some tricks with a knight in armour—one of the silent army that stood at intervals along the corridor—he had kissed her on the throat as she looked up at the painted Cupids on the ceiling.

And now he stood alone in the centre of this room, feeling as though she had occupied it for years and that he had suddenly lost her.

Lost her?

Had he lost her? That was the question which he now seemed to hear a voice asking him. Was he content to live for the rest of his days without her? Could it be possible that he who had wandered about the world without his hear-

being once touched until he had passed the age of thirty and had seen Minna Talbot, would now be content to allow the desire of his eyes to pass away from him for ever without a struggle—without even a protest?

That American woman, whose shrewdness and kindheartedness had made him like her from the first day they had met, had somehow come to know of the terrible inheritance that was Minna's; and yet she had upbraided him for his weakness in allowing it to be an insuperable obstacle to their marriage. It would be impossible for anyone to suggest that Miss Larkspur was a person likely to be swayed by her sentimental feelings at the sacrifice of her judgment. She was a woman of practical experience—a woman capable of looking at a difficult question from every standpoint that experience and common sense could suggest.

And yet, knowing all that she knew, she had not hesitated to tell him that she considered him to be a poor sort on account of his yielding without a struggle, or with only the semblance of a struggle, to the decree which he called the decree of Fate.

For a short time it was impressed upon him that he was all that the American woman had said he was. If he really loved Minna, surely he would not give her up in a moment?

But then the truth was forced upon him: Miss Larkspur did not know anything of that scene which had taken place in the studio. If that scene had not taken place there would still be a chance left for him and Minna. The curse might have died out with the death of her father. He might have been the last generation of the inheritors of that terrible taint. There would be a chance left to Minna—a chance that she should escape—that the sword which she feared had fallen for the last time and would not again be uplifted. But, alas, alas! the recollection of the eyes that had smiled in his face—the diabolic smile of the homicidal madman . . . her brother. . .

“Oh, my God! let us die—let us die!” he cried, throwing himself on his knees by the side of the little sofa on which she had been seated in the boudoir, and burying his face in his hands. He was swept along in the agony of the hour until he could only gasp, as a man gasps when he feels the strong, cold fingers of a rushing stream about his throat, strangling him as it hurls him along. “Death! death! oh, God, give us death!”

She had asked him to pray for her—to pray that she might die soon—soon.

Well, he had prayed for her and for himself.

But when two more days had passed the grief seemed to have become so much a part of his life as to cause him to think of it only as people who are born blind think of their blindness. They do not rail against it; it is their life. The wild mood of the profoundly despairing came upon him—the mood of the man who is ready to curse God and die, and who usually does die (of *delirium tremens*)—the mood of the man who knows that he has in him the seeds of an incurable disease, and who yells, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!”

“Why should we not have our day?” cried the voice within him. “What does it matter if all the demons of the Pit are laughing over us to-morrow if we live our life and have our joy to-day? Give her to my arms for a year—a month—a day—let judgment and reason and forethought and self-control go down the wind, we shall have had our day. God Himself cannot obliterate the evil of a day, and He is equally powerless to obliterate the joy, though He may bring it to an end and heap on us the fire of the Pit in the form of consequences.”

His was not the temperament of the man who flies to the bottle in his despairing mood. He roamed about his house with dry lips and sunken eyes, and that voice within him yelled everywhere—

“We shall have our day—we shall have our day!”

He pictured her everywhere; but every picture was a horrible one—it was painted with the crimson and purple of passion: their hour that he foresaw was an orgie of a pagan rabble—the unclean creatures of the pagan imagination, grinning fauns and satyrs.

He fled from the picture.

But he would have her: they would have their hour together in the face of Fate, and after that let the worst befall them that it was in the power of Fate to decree.

He hurried up to the Tower, and there he learned that Miss Talbot had gone to spend a few days with Miss Cosway. She would, however, be at the Tower the next day, when Sir George also was expected home. Sir George had been called away on business, the servant said.

He went with equal speed to the Cottage.

Lily saw him on the garden-path, and had no difficulty in perceiving that he had been walking fast. What did his eager haste mean, she wondered.

She met him in the hall and put both her hands out to him.

"News—you must have good news!" she whispered.

"Minna—I want to see her," he said. His voice was almost hoarse.

"She is in the drawing-room," said Lily. "She will see you, I'm sure. Have you no news that I can hear first?" she added, plaintively.

"I have no news—perhaps I may have some for you when I have seen Minna," he replied.

But he knew at that moment that he should have no news for her. Minna had spoken the truth in the studio: he knew her. He knew what her answer would be to the wild appeal that was throbbing in his heart.

She did not ask him why he had come to her. There was no expectant light in her eyes. She knew that he could bring her no news. The document of Fate had been written in stone—engraved on the rock. She had read it, and she knew that a rub of the sponge could obliterate no single letter.

"I have come to you, my beloved," he said—his voice was hard and dry. "I have come to you because I cannot live without you. I have come to say that I will not let anything remain as an obstacle between you and me. If the sword that you fancy is suspended above you by a thread is to fall, let it fall upon both of us—you shall be in my arms."

He took a fierce step toward her. She turned away her head and put up both her hands as if to keep him away from her. She could not trust herself ever to leave his arms if once she found herself within their clasp.

"Don't put out your hands against me," he cried. "How can you show me such cruelty? Do you not believe that I love you? Do you not believe me when I tell you that I cannot live without you?"

She went from where she was standing before him to one of the windows. She looked out upon the garden of roses. She could see the roses, but she could not taste of their perfume. The window was closed. She saw her life in that garden. A rose, but with its perfume—its essence, its soul

shut out from her for evermore. Would she offer him a soulless flower?

"Ah! you don't know how I have loved you—how I love you still—how my love has never ceased for a moment! My God! I feel that I never loved you until now," he cried. He had begun to pace the room with his hands locked together. "I never felt before now how you are my life—my whole life—my heart—my soul! But you don't believe me—you don't believe me, or you would not stand there unmoved."

Still she made no reply. She kept her eyes fixed upon the garden of roses. She did not even move her head.

"Listen to me, Minna," he said, coming beside her after an interval of agonizing pacing of the room. "Listen to me, my dearest love. Forgive me for the mad words I have just said. I want you to hear me, and to say if I do not speak reasonably. I want to tell you that I feel we have acted too hastily in this matter—in making up our minds that nothing is left for us but to part and never to see each other again. We have acted too hastily. Why should we let that imaginary barrier exist between us, shutting us out from all happiness in the world? But even assuming, as you have done, that that horrible thing is inevitable, why should it separate us? Death is inevitable, but we would not stand apart because we know that death will come to one of us, dividing asunder that one from the other. My darling, come to me! come to me! we shall have our day of gladness whatever may happen. Then let Fate do its worst, we shall at least have known what joy is. Look at your face in that glass, and tell me if it is God or the demon that you talk of that dwells in that face. God looks through your eyes, my beloved. God has made your body the dwelling-place of the sweetest soul that ever looked through human eyes. Ah, come to me; my beloved—come to me!"

Then she turned and looked at him through her streaming eyes. He was not a foot removed from her. He waited for a sign to clasp her. He waited . . . waited . . . waited . . .

She stood there pale and lovely, and her tears fell to the floor. Her hands were locked behind her. He thought once that she was struggling to speak, and he waited for the word to come . . . he waited . . . waited . . . waited . . . No word fluttered from that nest where the words seemed stirring.

There was a long silence, for she was not sobbing: her tears were silent.

He turned away, not in passion, not in anger, not even in disappointment.

"Is there no word to be said between you and me?" he cried in a low voice full of bitterness. "Is this silence to be the end of all?"

Still she spoke no word. She knew that she could not trust herself to speak a word. She felt that the sound of her own voice would break the force of her resolution—the resolution that somehow seemed to stand between her love and her true self.

He went to the door. He turned and held out both his hands to her, crying—

"Minna, it is good-bye."

With a cry of that anguish which is love she flung herself into his arms and kissed him on the mouth, holding him close to her.

"My darling, my darling, it is all that is left to us—this moment—this moment!" she cried.

Suddenly her hands unlocked themselves.

"Oh, go—go—go!" she said, piteously. "Go, Oswald, or it will be too late."

She flung herself down on the cushions of the sofa, sobbing her soul away, her hands clutching the drapery on each side.

He stood for a short time above her, then, with a groan, he rushed to the door.

* * * * *

Lily put no question to her that night. She did not need to ask her anything. She knew that whatever Oswald had said to her, Minna's resolution remained unchanged. The barrier, whatever it was, had not been removed by his visit to the Cottage. Lily had long ago abandoned the attempt to find out what was the nature of the fatal barrier. She was a trifle out of patience with Oswald because he had not been able to persuade Minna out of her resolution—she knew that he had come to the Cottage to try and accomplish that—and she was slightly out of patience with Minna for not being weak enough to allow herself to be persuaded out of her resolution. People who made resolutions and refused to be persuaded out of them were very provoking people.

Then she was also a trifle out of patience with her father,

who had been asked for advice, but had given her an epigram.

He had told her that the best way she could employ her time in his absence was by keeping an eye upon the rogue, and he had then added that if the rogue was not apparent, she would be acting prudently in keeping her eye upon the nearest business man.

That was a pretty piece of advice to give her.

And the worst of the matter was that the advice seemed quite intelligible to Miss Larkspur. It was not, however, meant for Miss Larkspur; it was meant by her father as a good practical suggestion to his own daughter; but it led her no whither.

And then there was Willie Passmore—she was slightly out of patience with him.

Was he never coming?

The hour at which she asked herself this last question was just eleven P.M.

Minna had gone to bed, so had the servants. The lamp in the room where she was sitting was turned down to the merest glimmer of flame. The moths flew in from the garden through the open window, and the whole room was filled with the odour of the roses.

And the soul of the rose, which is the spirit of love, was breathed by the girl, until it became part of her own sweet soul, and that was why she lay back among her cushions in the dim light, saying—

“Is he never coming?”

CHAPTER XLIV.

ON VALEDICTIONS.

MISS LARKSPUR was greatly perturbed in spirit, and when she was in such a condition she invariably found the open air soothing to her. She felt that it would be doubly soothing to her on the day after Oswald Clifford had endeavoured to redeem himself from the charge she had brought against him. Of course Miss Larkspur was unaware of his action, for the house was filled with the odour of some of those culinary pyrotechnic displays in which Colonel Passmore's cook was indulging for his master's tiffin. The tiffin promised to be singularly piquant.

"I rec that nigger's grilling some hell-fire to make it warm enough for your lunch, Cun'l," remarked Miss Larkspur. "Yes, sir; grilled hell-fire with cayenne pepper sprinkled over it, washed down with a tornado of brandy, and an ensilage cheroot to follow—that's an ideal lunch for a day when the glass sits down at eighty-five in the shade."

The Colonel was bustling about the house—one minute he was in the garden, the next he was stamping about the hall, and then he passed into the drawing-room, where Miss Larkspur was arranging her hat with the blue veil, preparatory to escaping from the worry of the Colonel, the fumes of his repast, and her own perturbation of spirit.

"If you knew all that I know, madam," said the Colonel, with a smile—his face was only in its third quarter: he had not yet swallowed his midday brandy—"If you knew all that I know—all that I have discovered—you wouldn't grudge me my simple refreshment."

"What have you discovered, Cun'l? I thought it most likely that something had been discovering you. It's about time that your Columbus was spoke, ain't it?" said Miss Larkspur.

"You'll learn soon enough what I've discovered, madam," said the Colonel. "The place will ring with it—ring with it. By Gad, madam, I shouldn't wonder if the news travelled as far as Weighborough!"

"You're a live man, Cun'l, but there ain't no show for

you at Weighborough," remarked the lady. "You'd best pull your freight and gun around for a new claim."

"Damn jargon!" muttered the Colonel. Then raising his voice as Miss Larkspur prepared to go down the avenue, he added, "You'll know why before night, Miss Imogene Larkspur——"

"Q," said the lady; "Imogene Q. Larkspur."

"Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur," repeated the Colonel. "It will come as a crash upon the neighbourhood, and the world will know whether William Cornelius Passmore or Imogene Lar—Q. Larkspur was right in estimating the boy's character."

"I'll cap for our Willie: the boy's all right," said Miss Larkspur. "If you'd only skip and dump yourself down in some other claim, I'd make a man of him—that I would, old man Passmore."

She was half-way down the drive before old man Passmore had thought of a crushing rejoinder. That was the worst of the woman: she invariably schemed to have the last word; usually she had the first as well.

The language which Colonel Passmore employed in referring to her disappearing figure was, on the whole, adequate to the occasion. It possesses no literary interest.

But Miss Larkspur continued her rapid walk along the road leading to the Court. After a long morning of thought she had come to the conclusion that she should have another interview with Oswald Clifford. She did not exactly know what she should call him this day. She hoped that she might be able to exercise more self-restraint than she had had at her command when she had strolled along the same road by his side some days before. But, after all, she had only called him a poor sort. That would not be likely to rattle in the side of any man who had gone a bit about the world. Why, she might have called him. . .

All the sub-tropical luxuriance of imagination which flourishes, with other abnormal growths, on the great Pacific Slope gave Miss Imogene Q. Larkspur some hints on the subject of the varieties of nomenclature which she might have applied to Oswald Clifford, had her aim really been to wound him. The least of the names that spread themselves before her like aloes of a hundred barbs would, she considered, cause a visit to his residence, unless after a considerable interval, seem in bad taste.

(She was probably right: she was a woman of a sound judgment.)

Yes, the footman said, Mr. Clifford might possibly be at home. If she would oblige him with her name he would find out exactly if Mr. Clifford was at home.

She was admitted to the library, where Oswald Clifford sat writing. She looked narrowly at him. He did not seem to be annoyed or to consider that she was an intruder. She felt that she was right: she had employed no phrase that had rankled. Men who have knocked about the world a bit resemble, in their reception of insults, the workers in the arsenic mines in respect to the poison: they can swallow a deal without feeling the worse for it.

"I'm afraid that you'll think me a busybody, Mr. Clifford," said she. "So I am. But I love that young woman."

"I know it," said he. "That makes a bond between us, doesn't it?"

He held out his hand to her, though he had shaken hands with her only a minute before. He was surprised to find that her hand was trembling.

But it was trembling. And yet most people would be disposed to think of Miss Larkspur as a woman of considerable nerve. Colonel Passmore was certainly one of the majority in regard to this question.

"It is a bond between us, Mr. Clifford," said she. "I want you to come along with me and pay her a visit right away."

"I can't do that, I'm sorry to say," he replied.

"You won't come?"

"I can't see my way."

"I'll show it to you."

"That would not help me. I'm past all help, Miss Larkspur; I went to see her yesterday."

"I heard nothing of that. Well, you took my advice?"

"I took your advice. I told her—oh, I implored her to come to me—not to allow that hereditary taint to be the obstacle which we had previously agreed it was."

"And what did she say, Mr. Clifford?"

"Nothing. Not one word did she speak in reply to my passionate entreaty. She stood there—at the window. I saw it—I saw the struggle that was going on—the most terrible struggle in which ever woman was engaged since the world was made. She longed with all her soul—oh, I saw

it with my eyes—to throw herself into my arms; but she locked her hands behind her and conquered.”

“And you came away.”

“I came away.”

“Then you’ve got to come back right away, Mr. Clifford.”

He shook his head.

“You’ve just got to come, Mr. Clifford,” she persisted.

“I can make a stronger appeal to her than you. I can make an appeal on a ground that cannot be resisted. I know all about that dreadful business in the past. But I can make her see that the dead past should be let bury its dead.”

“Oh, would to God that that could be accomplished!” he cried. “But that is just what the dead past will not do. I can’t go with you, Miss Larkspur, because I know her, and I know that she is right and that you and I are wrong. You will not prevail with her. She has a soul as well as the heart of a woman, and it is her soul that will be true to her womanhood. You will not be able to move her. If you were able, I don’t think that I could love her so well as I do now.”

“I’ve been mistaken in you, sir,” said Miss Larkspur, after a pause of considerable duration. Profound disappointment was in every tone of her voice. Some of the names which had suggested themselves to her as possible to describe his character came before her in all their pristine beauty, carrying around them the buoyant atmosphere of the region of their birth; but she felt that all the self-control should not be on Minna’s part. She wondered if Minna’s conflict of the day before was as great as hers, Miss Larkspur’s, to-day.

She merely said,—

“The young woman is still with our Lily, I opine?”

“She was to return to the Tower to-day,” said he. “She is almost certain to be at the Tower by this time. At any rate I assume that she will be there, for I am about to pay a visit to the Cottage to say good-bye to Lily; I should not like to add to the bitterness of my beloved’s grief by coming before her again.”

“I’ll go to the Tower,” said Miss Larkspur.

“Then I’ll say good-bye to you now,” said he. “I promised Lily to stay a month at home, but I find that it is impossible for me to keep my promise. Good-bye, Miss Larkspur.”

"So long," said she; "I won't say good-bye."

He saw her to the door.

She did not say another word to him; and for her self-restraint in this respect she felt that she deserved a public monument. Not only had he declined to aid her by his presence in the appeal she was about to make to Minna Talbot, he had actually told her in the most straightforward way—Miss Larkspur called it barefaced—that he feared, if her appeal were successful, he could not love Minna so well as he had loved her.

Great heavens! The man had actually said that, and yet she had refrained from calling him . . . a sub-tropical forest of verbiage rose before her. She stalked on firmly and resolutely. The smile upon her face was a very grim one.

She reached the Tower in due course and enquired for Miss Talbot.

Miss Talbot has not yet returned, the servant said; she was, however, expected back for dinner.

Miss Larkspur was turning away, when it occurred to her to enquire for Sir George Anderson—had he come back yet?

Sir George was expected back in time for lunch, the man said—probably within half an hour.

Miss Larkspur made a thoughtful pause on the threshold. Should she wait to see him, she asked herself; and she came to the conclusion that it would not be well for her to wait. She had never met Sir George.

"If he comes in shortly, will you please tell him that Imogene Q. Larkspur, a friend of Mr. Reginald Ashby, New York City, wants to see him right away? I'm going on to the Cottage—you understand?"

"It's a large order," said the servant. "Too much trouble to write it down, ma'am?"

He produced the hall slate—Sir George insisted on everything in his house being done in true business form—and she wrote upon it—

"Imogene Q. Larkspur, of Sardanapalus City, Mich., a friend and correspondent of Reginald Ashby, of New York City, would like to have a chat with Sir George Anderson with as little delay as possible. I. Q. L. will be at Professor Cosway's house for the next hour. 1 30 p.m."

"Give that to your master, should he come in to lunch," said Miss Larkspur.

The servant respectfully received the slate.

She turned away, but before she had taken a step in any direction, she said to the man in a tone of confidential enquiry—

“Say, is it part of your duty to lay out the lunch?”

He stared at her.

“Because if it is, you may spare yourself the worry: he won’t want that lunch. So long.”

She was on the road again, and striding firmly in the direction of the Cottage.

Yes, Miss Talbot was in the drawing-room, the maid said; but Miss Cosway had not yet returned from the village.

“I’ll see Miss Talbot,” said the visitor. “Just tell her Miss I. Q. Larkspur.”

In a few seconds she was face to face with Minna.

“Don’t try it, my dear; don’t try to smile,” cried Miss Larkspur. “It makes me feel bad to see you trying; though it’s real sweet of you to try. I’ve come here to set things right: I mean to set things right before I leave. You understand?”

“I understand your kindness—your sympathy, dear Miss Larkspur,” said Minna.

“I don’t mind about your understanding that,” said she. “What I want you to understand is that I’ve come to set things right: to send you to your lover again.”

Minna now made no attempt to smile. She shook her head.

“He’ll be up here presently—he told me so—to say good-bye to our Lily,” said Miss Larkspur. “He wouldn’t come if he didn’t think that you had returned to the Tower; but you’ve just got to go to him and say, ‘My love, there’s nothing in that horrible business that happened years ago to keep us asunder. The past is all dead and buried and a great stone has been rolled to the door of the sepulchre that all the angels in heaven or all the demons of the Pit cannot roll back’—that’s what you’ve got to say.”

“Dear Miss Larkspur, don’t you think that, if I could say that with truth, I would have said it long ago? The past is not dead. It is living in me. I don’t know how you have come to learn that terrible secret which was hidden from me for so many years; but it would appear that you are acquainted with it. That being so, you must know that the

past is not dead—that it never can be dead. You must know that it lives in me—me. Unto the third and fourth generations—that is the curse which is laid upon me. You know it, and yet you can ask me to go to him—to bring the curse of my life into his life! Oh, you cannot think that I love him or you would not ask me.”

“I know the secret, and yet I ask you, my dear. He knows it and he asked you yesterday,” said Miss Larkspur.

“He asked me yesterday, and I answered him,” said Minna. “He knows me—he knows how I love him. He will never ask me again.”

“But you can ask him, my dear. There he is at the bottom of the garden now, with the boy and girl. Let me call him in.”

“No, no, no; why should the bitterness of parting be repeated? Please go away now, Miss Larkspur. I have always liked you, and I know that your only aim is to make us happy; but I cannot hear you say anything more to me.”

“I’ll go.” Miss Larkspur rose and held out her hand. “I’ll go; but maybe twenty years hence, when you’re lonely and alone, you’ll wish that you hadn’t turned me out.”

“I’m not turning you out. I would like you to stay forever with me,” cried Minna, still holding her visitor’s hand in both her own. “Don’t leave me in anger, my dear Miss Larkspur. You know how fond of you I am. Let me kiss you.”

Miss Larkspur put her arms about the girl and kissed her. Then went to the door.

She stood irresolute with her hand upon the handle for a few moments. Then she returned slowly to the girl’s side.

“I’ll not talk to you on that subject again,” said she. “Do you know why I am here to-day—why I came to this side? Was it to look after our Willie? not likely. Was it to correspond with the *Sardanapalus City Clarion*? not likely. I was only to see you, my dear; and I thought that I might go home again, leaving you happy.”

“Why should you take such interest in me?” asked Minna. “Was it because you had heard of that—that sadness in the past?”

“That’s so,” said Miss Larkspur. “Your father had visited us in the States, and we liked him—I . . . well, we loved each other, and we had exchanged promises. He

was going to Europe, and was to return and marry me in the Fall. But we quarrelled—a mad, foolish quarrel—and we parted in anger. It was surely with the passion of that quarrel on him that he married the woman who became your mother. A year after, that terrible thing happened. We won't speak of it."

"No, no; we had much better not speak of it," said Minna.

"She could never have loved your father; the man she went away with was known to be a scoundrel."

"The man—what man?" asked Minna.

"Her lover, the scoundrel who enticed her away from her husband! Didn't you tell me that you had learned that sad business?" said Miss Larkspur, looking with surprise at the startled face of the girl.

"Then you do not know the other matter?" said Minna, in a whisper.

"There is no other matter to know, my dear," replied Miss Larkspur. "Wasn't it that—the taint of your mother's crime—which separated you and Mr. Clifford?"

Minna sighed.

"If it were only that!" she said. "I had never heard of that. But I heard of the other secret—worse—far worse!"

"There's no other secret that I know of; and those who say there is another tell you a lie."

"Ah, you don't know."

"I know that your father, when he abandoned you in London—leaving you to be brought up by his friend Anderson, and making him sole trustee of your fifty thousand dollars—was a fool. He would not even look at you—as if you should suffer for your mother's sin! That is what I told him when we met again in the States fifteen years ago—that's what I told him when I saw him the day before I started for Europe—that's what I am going to tell him when I return. Good Lord! what's the matter? Why do you stare at me, child?"

Minna was staring—staring—staring at her. She passed her hand over her eyes. Then she said slowly—

"This is the beginning of it—the madness!"

"Madness? It's the truth!" cried Miss Larkspur.

Minna looked at her with wild eyes. In a moment she sprang upon her, grasping her fiercely by the shoulders.

"Woman!" she cried—her voice was almost a shriek—

"Woman, swear to me that you have told me the truth—swear to me that my father is alive!"

"My child, would I tell you anything but the truth? I thought that you had found out all. I have told you God's truth. Any one who has told you different has told you the devil's lie. You are Reginald Ashby's daughter."

Minna tried to reach the French window. She would have fallen but for Miss Larkspur's friendly hand.

"There—you said he was there!" she managed to whisper. "Call him—tell him—if I should die."

Miss Larkspur helped her to the sofa, and then rushed to the window. She threw it open on its hinges and made a sign. He had heard the movement of the latch and had looked round. He was in the room in a moment.

Minna sprang to her feet with a cry of delight, and stretched out her hands to him. He caught her.

"Oswald—darling—that man—he is not my brother—my father lives—lives——"

The joy that came to his heart failed to find utterance. He held her close to him, covering her white face with kisses.

"She has fainted—the sofa!" said Miss Larkspur.

He looked at the face that lay upon his arm.

"Shall she die? Oh, my God, shall she die?" he cried.

"You should know better than to ask such a question," said Miss Larkspur. "There's water in that jug, and I'm too careful a woman to come anywhere without a bottle of sal volatile."

He knelt by the sofa, holding her hand, while Miss Larkspur treated her in her own way. In a short time she opened her eyes. He gave a shout that startled Minna's attendant. Minna smiled. He put his arms about her.

"She told me—she gave us life again," murmured the girl.

He was on his feet in a moment, and had put his arms about Miss Larkspur, kissing her.

Minna laughed—actually laughed.

Lily entered, followed by Willie, through the French window: Oswald had his arms about her in a moment, and was kissing her also.

It was Willie who now laughed.

Sir George Anderson entered by the drawing-room door.

Oswald sprang upon him, as though he were a house-breaker.

"You ruffian!" he cried. "If she had died, I would have killed you."

He took his hands off his collar. Sir George fell into a chair.

"I was never so treated before," he said, with dignity—some dignity. He looked toward Minna. "How is she?" he asked, a trifle feebly.

"How is who?" said Miss Larkspur.

"Minna."

"Minna who?"

"You know, I suppose," said Sir George, rising.

"Minna who?"

"Ashby. How is my dear friend Reginald Ashby? Oh, why was he so unnatural a father?"

"Sir George," said Oswald, "I may have been a little rough just now. But why—tell us why—why you told her that that man was her brother—why you showed her that paper?"

"You are not a business man, sir. You cannot understand the exigencies of business," said Sir George. He had now fully recovered the use of his dignity. "Her father wished her to bear some other name than that which her mother had dishonoured, and as I had been appointed the guardian of—of that unfortunate young man, I thought it most discreet to call her by his name, Talbot, and to refer to them as brother and sister. Could I foresee the terrible eventuality?"

"But the paper—the old paper?" said Minna.

"Ah, thank God, I had the strength of mind to show you that!" cried Sir George, devoutly. "I was on the verge of ruin that day, and if any enquiry had been made for the ten thousand pounds which constituted your fortune I should have been ruined. You told me that Mr. Clifford would enquire for it, and that paper was my only chance. Thank God, that I had strength of mind to show it to you. I saved myself from ruin and you from the loss of the money. A seam has been discovered in the Hallelujah mine—the mine which had almost made me bankrupt—and I could sell my share in it to-day for eighty thousand pounds. It is hard to make outsiders understand business—very hard. I wish you good-day."

He almost fell into the arms of Mr. Cosway, who was at the point of entering the room, with Colonel Passmore behind him.

"That's an excellent business man, papa," cried Lily, when Sir George had closed the door behind him—as usual—very gently.

Mr. Cosway smiled.

"But in spite of him Minna is happy once more," continued Lily.

"I'm sorry to be compelled to introduce a discordant element," said Colonel Passmore; "but duty is duty."

"Colonel Passmore has a serious charge to make against one of our friends," said Mr. Cosway.

"A very serious charge," repeated the Colonel. "You are well rid of that young reprobate—that young profligate, Miss Cosway. You have escaped from his clutches!"

"That's pretty fair for a start," said Willie. "Out with your charges, old man Passmore. Dump them down without delay."

"You young profligate!" shouted the Colonel. "I have found you out. Stealing from your house at nightfall—not returning until the morning! Where have you been, sir—where have you been?"

"I'm damned if I'll give an account of my movements to you," said Willie. He had become very red in the face—not quite so red as Lily had become—but still tinged. "But I may tell Mr. Cosway here that Lily and I have been married for—well, for some time past."

"Married?" shouted the Colonel, after a pause.

"Married?" said Miss Larkspur. "Give me your hand, my lad; I knew that I'd make a man of you."

"No, you didn't; it was she—she who made a man of me," said Willie.

"Yes, papa." Lily had moved to her father's side. "Yes, papa, dear. You see we both got frightened lest something should come between us—when something had come between Oswald and Minna inside a month, what chance would we have for two years and—and more? So Willie went to London and got a special license, and a very nice young clergyman, who knew Willie at Oxford, married us on—ah—some time ago."

"God bless you both!" cried her father. "This sudden resolute action comes to me in the light of a revelation. It was my absence that precipitated the step. Would you have thought of it under normal conditions? I fancy not. The Normal is the enemy to the Original. Here is a ten-pound

note to buy yourself a present with. I won it from the Dean of Merechester and Herr Doctor Greimhaus, my eminent fellow-worker, at a game called poker. We played it at the Deanery for two days and two nights. It is a game that demands a good deal of nerve, judgment, and—shall we call it, perception of character? Yes, I won ten pounds, after some varying fortune. Had the game of poker reached the Great Republic before you left, Miss Larkspur?"

"They say on our side, 'Show me a good poker-player and I'll show you a good liar,'" said Miss Larkspur. "I believe that professors of history are invariably at the head of the profession of poker-players. How much did you say you won, sir?"

"I wash my hands clear of all responsibility for that lad's actions!" cried the Colonel, rising. "I claim to be released from the duties of guardianship."

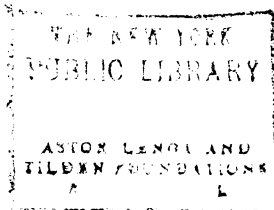
Miss Larkspur looked at him with scorn.

"Old man Passmore, git," she said.

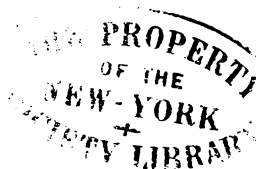
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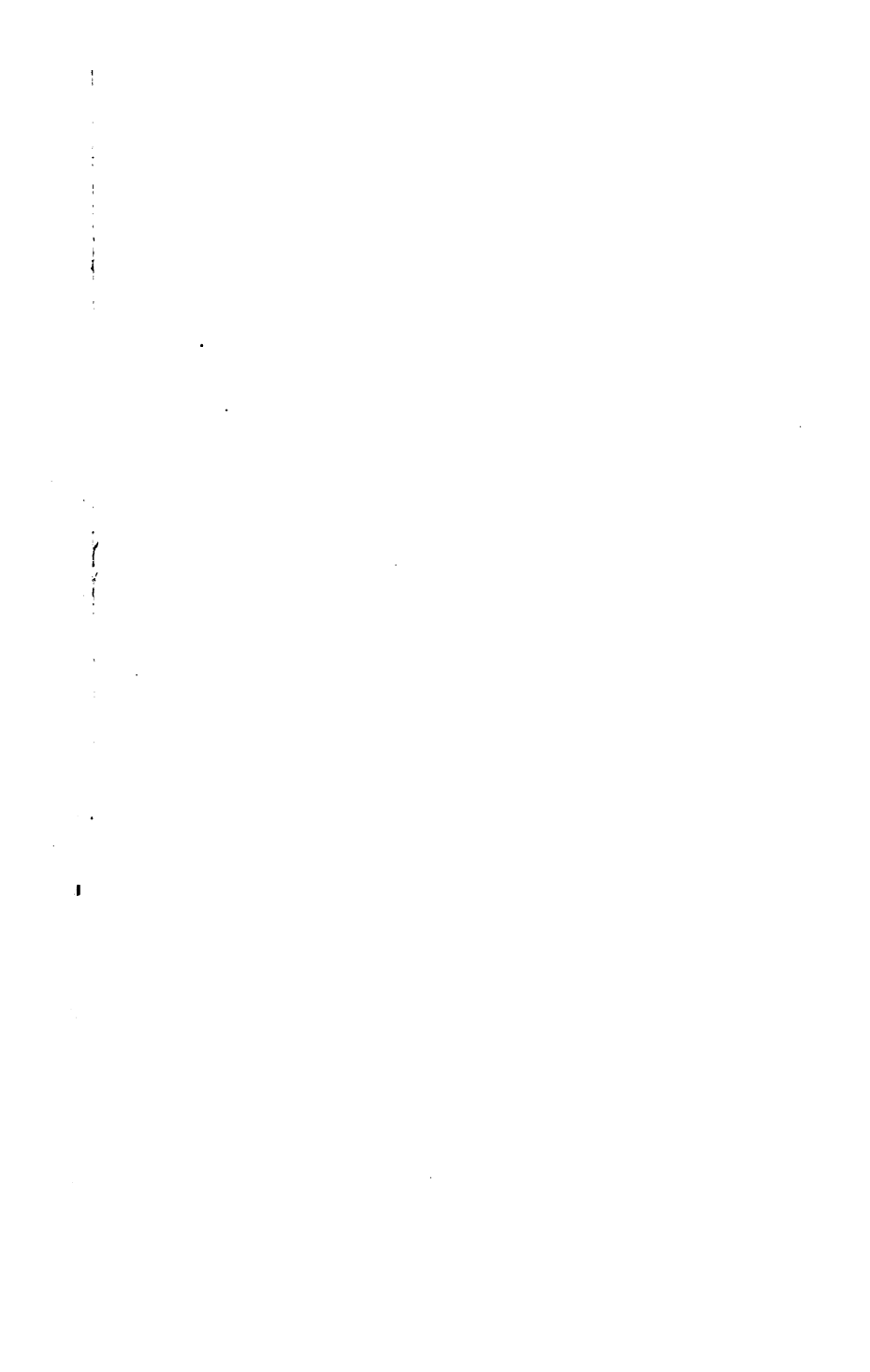
"*Come without delay,*" Miss Larkspur wrote in a letter which she posted that night. "*Come. You've been an unnatural father so far; but you may redeem your character if you come at once. She is just the loveliest flower that blooms on this side. Oh, come at once!*"

And he came.



THE END.





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